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Matters

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Theory and Culture

No. 7 [2017]

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In Memoriam

Pamela Sue Anderson

We mourn the loss of the distinguished scholar, Professor Pamela Sue Anderson, Chair of European Philosophy of Religion at the University of Oxford, who passed away on the 12th of March, 2017. Professor Pamela Sue Anderson was an eminent philosopher of religion; she combined her “rational passion” for the works of Immanuel Kant and Paul Ricœur with profound insights into the works of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and, above all, Michèle Le Dœuff. These studies represent only a part of her versatile research interests. Pamela Sue Anderson was the first person to express her keen and unremitting support of *Text Matters*, which was not only reflected in her immediate decision to accept my invitation to join the advisory board, but in her enthusiastic and generous commitment to the journal. Her article and interview (“Michèle Le Dœuff’s ‘Primal Scene’: Prohibition and Confidence in the Education of a Woman” and “Engaging the Forbidden Texts of Philosophy”) were invaluable contributions to the first issue of *Text Matters* entitled “Women and Authority” (2011). She also edited issue four of *Text Matters* (2014) entitled “Re-visioning Ricœur and Kristeva,” and she kindly accepted our invitation to grace the launching of this issue with her presence and lecture that was chaired by Professor Joanna Jabłkowska, the current dean of the Philological Faculty. We were all affected by her kindness and generosity in sharing the ideas that were meant to evolve into another project, but Pamela’s illness and death put an end to these plans. We mourn the loss of a philosopher who was a great authority, and we mourn the loss of a friend. We will remember Pamela’s radiance and will strive hard to meet the high expectations she had of our journal which she so warmly and lovingly supported.

Dorota Filipczak with the *Text Matters* Team

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A SPECIAL EVENT IN *TEXT MATTERS*



“I Made This Munch”: Mieke Bal Talks
to Dorota Filipczak about the Exhibition
*Emma & Edvard: Love in the Time of
Loneliness*, opened in Munchmuseet,
Oslo (27 Jan. 2017)¹

Dorota Filipczak: Professor Bal, first of all, thank you very much for the opportunity to continue our conversation about *Madame B*, which you and Michelle Williams Gamaker premiered at the Museum of Modern Art in Łódź in 2014. Your exhibition toured to different places afterwards, but this site is completely new in the sense that the video installation has been brought literally into art and surrounded with Munch’s paintings. Could you say how this actually refigures the whole idea of immersive exhibition as a genre?

Mieke Bal: It changes the exhibition, of course, if you have two bodies of work together in dialogue. A good example is *Wedding*, where Emma is lonely at her own wedding, and on the other side you see *The Wedding of the Bohemian* by Munch, where the bride is also completely lonely in the crowd of men. The idea that you can be lonely in a social space because you are not allowed to participate, is the topic and the feeling or the affect that they share. But they also question the social world. The fact that Munch’s paintings have this dialogic relationship to the videos, and the videos to Flaubert, and Flaubert to Munch, makes it a multiple dialogue, and visitors are going to be a part of that dialogue.

DF: Now that you have mentioned the dialogic relation between particular artists, I would like you to comment on the concept of the cinematic which connects them all, and on the connection between the cinematic and movement, that is, physical movement or emotional movement (as the word emotion suggests), and finally on the political aspect which is embedded in all of these.

MB: Yes, those are various aspects of the idea of movement, and the cinematic binds them together in the sense that the cinematic is based on movement.

¹ I would like to thank Michelle Williams Gamaker and Elan Gamaker for filming this interview in Munchmuseet, Oslo.

And our videos are an example of that. But the exhibition also shows that Munch painted in a way that expresses movement in the sense that you see people moving out of the frame, you see the galloping horse running madly towards the viewer, who may be scared and think: “Oh, I am in danger.” There is the emotional movement of figures shown in poignant situations where you feel for them, so you are enticed to have empathy, which is a lesson in empathic living in society. So that goes towards the political movement where you are getting ready to make a change, getting ready to do something, because you get the feeling something needs to be done; not doing it yet, but getting ready in your mood. That’s political movement. You have seen some nuances that you hadn’t seen before. That’s what art can do. And that’s the third movement in the theory of movement.

DF: I would like to hear your comment on the concept of framing as you use it in the book [*Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*], and also as you use it here in the exhibition in order to shock us out of a passive look at Munch. When we are brought into the interaction between the paintings and the videos, we begin to see both, hence, also the paintings differently. It’s no longer a passive or static view. So, immersive exhibition also affects the way we look at the paintings and we see them with a new eye. Could you comment on this process?

MB: Well, let me first say that immersive exhibition for Michelle Williams Gamaker and me is not the same as the old concept of immersive as going down under, being passive and being completely submerged by the exhibition. For us the genre of immersive exhibition means that you get close enough into it that you feel emotions that are around you but at the same time you can be critical of it. The critical aspect of looking is incited by these works. I think that Munch shows situations which are morally or politically objectionable, but he shows them so that you can have a critical perspective on them. So, he is not simply repeating the misogyny in the society but he is showing the dangers of it. In effect, he is not a misogynistic artist.

DF: I’d like to ask you about your approach to Munch because it seems that he’s been the subject of a bio-critical approach that has done harm to the ambiguity and potential of his paintings. This is something you consistently refuse. How does that alter our perspective on him?

MB: I think with an artist such as Munch it is very important to get out of that mode of seeing, because due to that kind of knowledge you recognize what you think you already know. You see this image of a man sitting in

a restaurant with a bottle of wine next to him and a glass and you think: “Oh, yes he was a drunkard.” Now, does that help to understand the painting? No! On the contrary. All you see is the bottle and the situation of drunkenness. And what you don’t see is the novelty in the painting where you have the most poignant expression of loneliness combined with a portion of orange in the left lower corner, that is, behind his chair but also over his chair, and if you insist on seeing only the drunken man being lonely, you have to say that this chair is on fire. But you won’t even see that colour. And that orange colour is, in fact, an experiment with abstraction that Munch brings into many of his paintings. There are barely any paintings that are realistic in a naturalistic sense. They are all figurative in a way that challenges figuration, and that dialogue between abstraction and figuration is what interests me in Munch the most.

DF: You stress in your book [*Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways*] that the cinematic is the site that leads beyond figuration.

MB: Yes, it’s because the cinematic always shows before and after at the same time, and the scene itself because there is a continuity to it. So, what you see, for example, in *The Wedding of the Bohemian* is this man going out. Is he fed up with the situation? Has he been rejected? What’s the social situation here? You know that something is coming, and it is this movement that allows you to speculate and that makes you active as a viewer.

DF: Let me refer to the scene in which Emma is shown walking into the space of Sol LeWitt’s paintings, and she asks a question: “Where is the art?” The answer is “it’s all around you,” and here this is mirrored through the effect of Munch’s paintings and video installation in combination. In a post-modern way, these works of art mirror each other. Could you comment on the effect and what it contributes to all the cultural texts quoted here?

MB: Yes, if you look at Flaubert’s writing from a postmodern perspective, you are going to see it everywhere. He describes getting into the street Emma has never been to. First, you get the view of the houses, the steep perspective into the street that you see in Munch everywhere with lanes that go up. And in the next paragraph Flaubert describes a section of the house from below. Now, that makes no sense if you are a realist. Then you would have to say “Mistake,” and Flaubert makes these mistakes purposefully. He also plays with verb tenses, for example, using the *imparfait* which is the tense of continuity with the word “suddenly,” which is impossible. He does it and he does something with that. It is saying that Emma is

deceiving herself that this is a sudden excitement but it is, in fact, already a routine. And you also have that sort of effect in the space itself because you see these videos of Emma’s life as you also see these other scenes and these fantasies. And because the one invokes the other, it all starts to go in many directions, and the viewer has to be active. You cannot sit here and just let it come, because then you don’t see anything. So, in that sense it’s postmodernism in the service of the activation of the viewer.

DF: The exhibition is actually defined by the phrase “looking sideways” or “the sideways look.” Now, your art and your critical works have been consistently concerned with the act of looking and the act of seeing. Could you describe the role of “looking sideways”? What does it bring into our interpretation of your installation and Munch’s works?

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MB: What I try to convey with “the sideways look” is the refusal to engage with the world, with other people; avoiding the dialogic look. But at some point, it also becomes a form of seeing from the corner of the eye what’s happening outside in the world. So, it’s not only the avoidance of dialogic looking; it can also be an expression of shyness. He doesn’t dare to enter the world of the girls in the first room of the exhibition. But it is also possible that the figures have the interiorized look of someone who is so absorbed that they don’t express anything. Or, it can be a form of witnessing. Seeing what you are not supposed to see. Like the tragedies that you see at certain points when you see, for example, the painting of a drowning child in which the sideways-looking older Edvard sees that a child is drowning, while people are walking on the nearby pier, and nobody sees it. This is a suspenseful cinematic moment.

DF: I am intrigued by the concept of synesthesia which comes up now and again in this exhibition and also in your book. You tend to use it quite a lot, when you say, for example, that Charles’s speech is “a sonic image” of boredom, or when you call the paintings by Munch “a visual novel” which is also a cross-senses comment. Or when you say that *The Scream* has a soundtrack. How can this quality of the exhibition affect the way we see?

MB: I think synesthesia is, in fact, the only way that the senses work. When you are in an exhibition, you feel your legs get tired, which is why these benches have been put here. The fact that people have the chance to sit and take their time with the paintings changes it. You see the texture of the surfaces, so you are almost feeling it, and because of this installation with

the videos and the paintings you constantly hear things, so you are already in synesthesia. Talking about *The Scream* . . .

DF: Yes, I’ve wanted to ask you why you didn’t include it.

MB: I didn’t select *The Scream* because it’s on towels and T-shirts in the shop. I cannot see this painting anymore without seeing these kitschy objects, and so I thought it should be eliminated, so that people don’t have these associations. It would fit the topic very well, though, because there is a scene when Emma screams, but I didn’t think that it was properly placed in this situation. There are some famous paintings in this exhibition, but there are also some that are not so well-known. I want people to concentrate on them, whereas recognition as a way of looking is totally meaningless; so, we cannot see *The Scream* anymore. We can only recognize it, and that is something I find very problematic. I’m not avoiding the iconography of *The Scream* because it has the coloured movements, the waves around it, and this is a sort of visual soundtrack. And there is an allusion to *The Scream* in the series *Alpha and Omega*, for which Munch made twenty-six works on paper from which I selected six, and there is one there where you see the scream in a man in loneliness. You see that he is screaming and that he is alone, and the waves are there so you can construct that as a soundtrack. That’s a much more discreet version of it. I am already nervous that people will just recognize it, but I am hoping that they will see it in the context of the other images, and then they will make more of it.

DF: I’d like to ask you about a famous statement by Munch: “I paint what I saw not what I see.” In your book you are greatly concerned with the influence of Bergson, and with the role of memory.

MB: Exactly, the famous case is Munch’s painting of the dying sister that he painted fifteen years or so after the fact. And he paints what he saw, but in the act of memory you see it again, in the present. So, he could as well have said: “I paint what I saw, therefore I paint what I see (in my mind’s eye).” I think memory is the only way that you can actually perceive. If you look, you always look in the present. In the present I see it now, but I see loneliness because there is something in my own baggage that recalls that, for example, the scene in *Wedding* where Emma is so lonely, as in that *Wedding of the Bohemian* the bride is so lonely, and because you remember that you saw it there. Perception without memory is impossible, but perception is necessarily in the present; that is the wonderful thing. It fills up with memories, because otherwise it would make no sense. There would be no meaning.

DF: Talking about loneliness, I would like to ask you a question about fantasy. It runs through the whole exhibition not only through the part that is explicitly entitled “Fantasy.” Fantasy presupposes concentrating on yourself. It excludes others.

MB: That’s true. There is one room devoted to fantasy, and from there on in each room I want the viewers to carry on the baggage that I built up there, and go to the next room with that idea in mind, and then do something with that. You’re right, fantasy is a way of being concentrated on yourself. You create your own fantasy; nobody can touch it. Well, that’s not quite true. They do touch it. There is *Shaping and Moulding* (in *Madame B*) at the entrance to the gallery where the teaching and exercises in being creative at home are completely influenced by what Emma learns in society, fashion models, clichés and so on. So, fantasies are also filled with stereotypes and clichés, but they are liberated in the sense that you have the freedom to inflect them. As for the sexualized images of women in the fantasy gallery, it is a series where you see the fantasy going from lovely, innocent and romantic to more and more sexualized, sinister and violent. And at the end of this small sequence you see a woman weeping. There is a violent fantasy with all those hands around the woman whose skirt is a little too low. She wouldn’t have put it that way herself. It’s as if the hands have taken the skirt down. In the next image, you see the woman in the same skirt sitting and weeping. So, there is fantasy, and then it continues into the pondering of the consequences if fantasy were to become reality. And you think if you do this, this is the result, and that is also a response to the social situation, and social possibilities, which is why I put this image of a naked woman with long red hair next to the woman with red hair in a proper dress whom you would be proud to parade with on your arm in the city. And that is also a fantasy. So, fantasies are not disconnected from the social reality.

DF: I’d like to ask you about the charge of misogyny which sometimes comes up in feminist criticism of Munch’s paintings. This is something you try to nuance if not reject, and then you actually try to draw the viewer’s attention to Munch’s empathy. That’s a very different discursive position. Could you comment on that shift which in fact is a part of your own intervention as the curator of this exhibition?

MB: Exactly, I think it is really important to both acknowledge the misogyny when you see it, and then to realize that he is showing it to us in a possibly critical way. Like in *The Wedding of a Bohemian*, the woman is

completely isolated among these men, and nobody talks to her. They are just supervising her instead of engaging with her. That is a very poignant image of loneliness, as poignant as the man with the bottle of wine. And in the painting of a pubescent girl who is surrounded by big, phallic, dark shadows, Munch shows how difficult and scary this situation is for the young girl. He shows it with empathy. I think that showing the misogyny is not necessarily endorsing it. It can also be indicting it, and I think the indictment is very often implied, even if not always. There are also images where you think: "My God, do you have to do this?" But the possibility to read it in this ambivalent way is always there. There is nothing that is not ambivalent and ambiguous in Munch's work. By the way, Flaubert was also known to be a misogynist. He was not very successful in relationships, and the two had a lot in common in their respective biographies. But what's the relevance for their art?

DF: In fact, you call Flaubert's novel a proto-feminist novel, which comes as a surprise.

MB: I think it is a fiercely feminist novel. *Madame Bovary* is an indictment of patriarchy and an indictment of capitalism. And Emma is a victim, even if also a perpetrator, because you cannot step out of the ideology. So, she has no choice but to be a part of her own undoing. Yet Flaubert is not endorsing what he is showing. He is not saying: she was so stupid and so immoral to take a lover. How dare she? In fact, Gustave and Edvard are my buddies, and that is not really because they were good guys rather than bad guys. They were sensitive, and that's why they were great artists. And that sensitivity accounts for the political view and ambivalence that you see everywhere in their work. Misogynistic situations are shown with a critical angle, at least the potential of a critical angle. Munch is not preaching. Neither is Flaubert. It's not propaganda for a particular position, but they make it so ambivalent and complex that it's hard to avoid the awareness that you need to make a choice. So, if you are going to be lecherous and look at those half-naked women and say "Oh, great piece," that is a way of avoiding the richness of the depiction. Despite their alleged misogynistic practices in life, Flaubert and Munch are not misogynistic as artists. They are rather indicting the misogynistic culture around them. It's a very different thing to endorse than to show it. Because showing it can be a way of indicting it. The painting of a syphilitic child dying on his mother's lap is a way of saying: the problem is not the prostitutes. The problem is the men who visit them and then infect their wives. So that's where you have to take it on. It's just a banal example, and it's not even in the exhibition.

DF: Intervention seems to be the keyword throughout the exhibition.

MB: I think good art in general is an intervention in the sense that if the viewer takes time to really establish a dialogue with the artwork, it will change their mind. It's as if there is someone there telling you to pay attention to this or that. You need to empathize with this and understand that. And the artwork expressing that makes you change, change your opinions or automatic responses. And that is an intervention. But curating is also an intervention in the sense that I am completely aware that I am presenting a Munch that is very different from the usual but is also my creation. I made this Munch. And the protagonist Edvard, the holder of the point of view and the self-exposed individual is a creation; if I put them together in this way I am creating this cinematic, narrative sequence that Munch didn't make, because he did not put those paintings together. But he says himself in an interview that he was actually convinced when he saw the paintings exhibited, curated by someone else. Then he saw the coherence he hadn't seen before. So, even biographically he would be on my side. Art is always in a situation, in a context, and in an exhibition, it is in the context of more images. And that is how they speak to each other. So, when you come from a certain room, like “Fantasies,” and you come to this room, “Loneliness,” then you go to the next room, “Turmoil,” you carry over what you have just seen. And so, in that sense the curating is an intervention that changes the work. For the time being, of course; it is only up in this way for two and a half months.

DF: So, we could say this is your narrative with Edvard as the focalizer. In fact, you liberate Edvard, the focalizer, from Munch. And that is a major distinction. At the moment when Edvard sees something we can turn around and see the paintings that he sees, even if he keeps looking sideways which might suggest that he is trying to avert his eyes from something. This is the artistic gesture that you have been using throughout the exhibition. The example I have in mind is *Kissing Couples in the Park* focalized by Munch's character.

MB: Actually, facing this painting is another painting of someone escaping from a burning house—although it is not officially a burning house, but for me it is. He runs out and he runs towards *Kissing Couples in the Park*, so you have the cropped man who is facing a woman who is even more severely cropped because the face of the woman in *Kissing Couples* is half-cropped. All you see is her eyes, and that is because she is not participating. She is not one of the couples. She has no one to kiss, so she becomes the lonely one. And she escapes from that loneliness by going out of the frame.

And the man is going out of the burning house and also going out of the frame. That is the curatorial intervention because when you get these paintings facing each other, you gain something different. The interesting thing is that in the same room where these paintings are you have the video installation *Boredom Sets in* where Emma is at a party flirting with a nice-looking man who dances with her because her former teacher has said to him: "You should dance with her. She's so lonely." And that is a scene Charles is witnessing, but he doesn't want to see it, because he is so upset that in front of him Emma is dancing and flirting with someone else, so he's desperately trying not to see it. That is an example of the sideways look.

DF: I'm intrigued by what you've said about the girl who is trying to escape the frame in the painting with kissing couples. There is this cube in which we have four screens with Emma at home, and it's like she cannot escape the frame. The whole spatial arrangement makes it impossible for her to leave that prison. Could you comment on the use of space here?

MB: The cube in which we have the four routines of Emma, where she is with Rodolphe, or she is at home being bored till she screams; then she is in the shop trying to overcome her boredom by acquiring luxury goods; she is being meddled with by the neighbors. Those are her routines of life, and they are confining. And the cube is just a little narrow for having these four screens but that is intentional so that you feel the confinement. You can sit comfortably enough, but it's a bit small. That is the smallness of her life. So, it's the confinement she cannot escape, and we cannot escape it either. Therefore, we have reason to be empathetic.

DF: Now I would like to ask you about technical aspects: how all the artists in the exhibition draw attention to the materiality of their medium, the texture, the formal aspects. You seem to juxtapose the opacity of Flaubert's language, the patches in Munch's style of painting and also the blurs that you and Williams Gamaker use in your video installation.

MB: This is a really good question and a good point. What is very important in this exhibition is the texture, the texture in all sorts of ways, the material objects. And the reason that the benches are there and the paintings are hung so low is to make people immerse themselves in that confrontation with materiality. Munch is a very material painter. You have moments in his work when faces become masks, but that is because the paint is so thick that they become like masks; and that becomes the imaginary of the mask. Hence, you don't know what comes first; it could very well be

the intervention of the materiality. For example, the melancholic woman sitting on the beach at the end of the exhibition is so thinly painted as if melancholy is erasing her. She is already half-dead; melancholy is a sort of paralysis. You cannot do anything when you are melancholic. It's a kind of severe depression, and that is conveyed in the materiality of the paint that is almost transparent; also, the canvas is a part of the colours playing along.

DF: So, abstraction is in the eye of the beholder as you say in your book [*Emma and Edvard*]?

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MB: Like in the painting of a lonely man with a bottle of wine. Is the orange colour the indication of figuration or abstraction? It's your choice, but you cannot say it's just a chair because the chair is half-overwritten by the orange. And the patch of orange is what you want to see that is relevant for you. But not to see it would mean you follow the biographical criticism—his figure is drinking and that is why he is lonely. Then you don't see the painting. You don't see the paint. You don't see the colour.

Michelle Williams Gamaker (co-director of *Madame B*): Could I ask a question that might be relevant for the back story of our work? It is about the complicity of the viewer in witnessing and participating in the exhibition and the complicity of the artist to draw upon our personal experience, even misogynistic elements that might play out through their life. Are we judging or are we participating when we are in it?

MB: That is the point of our new conception of immersive exhibition, that's exactly right. The curation creates a situation in which we are invited to participate. And we are there and in that sense, we are complicit because we endorse the traditional marriage, and at the same time the things that go wrong there like the creepy priest and the loneliness of the bride, the gossiping around her: we don't have to endorse it; we can hear the gossiping and think: “Damn, at her own wedding she is the object of gossip,” and then you take a critical attitude, not to Emma but to the society surrounding her and making her miserable. Hence, because of the immersive installation you are enticed to be complicit, and from within to be critical. There is no place outside of ideology, but within it you can try to turn the screws a bit and to say: “Maybe we should think a little more about this,” because ideologies too can change. But you have to do it. This is the idea that Judith Butler put forward: “you have to repeat and repeat and repeat, and then turn it around a little bit.” And then it can change. You cannot go outside of ideology but you can change it from within. And that is what

we try to do in the installation, to invite people to go into these fictional situations and see what happens, and then reflect on it. We try to make self-reflection a part of the situation, which is why at the end we have a mirror. It says: in case you haven't discovered yet, this is an exhibition about self-reflection. People may think, of course, we have seen that. But it's a good reminder at the end.

DF: On a different note, I would like to ask you about the intermedial quotation. I am quoting a phrase from your book. The whole exhibition here is intermedial; it connects various media, genres and conventions; it is informed by synesthesia, so it dissolves many boundaries. How does it relate to the theatre? You seem to influence the viewers the way theatre does, especially Grotowski's theatre. It's a different organization of space with the viewers asked to come to the stage and witness the play, but also participate. The same happens here. We are invited to face these screens; we wander around, we select. Could you comment on the way you use a theatrical element in this particular exhibition, which is different from the previous ones, for example, the one in Lodz?

MB: Yes, it is different, because through the concept of the cinematic as the basis of the exhibition it is inviting a kind of awareness of continuity that you go to the next painting with the other painting in mind that you have already seen. You see the screens and you recognize something from the paintings. The resonances between videos and paintings are stronger and more numerous than I've ever foreseen, because you can only see it when you see it and undergo it at the same time. It is theatrical in the sense that it is one big stage and we are in it; we are on it. We are characters in this play.

DF: We become characters in the installation; we share the same status. Incidentally, I wonder how important previous commitments were to you. You dealt with the Bombay artist, Nalini Malani, and her shadow plays which, in fact, seem to share some features with your installation, because you have to walk into the shadow play, you get inside it. Do you bring the insights from that previous commitment into this exhibition?

MB: Well, you always do, because it's me doing it. I've been interested in narrative; I began to make films, so I got interested in the cinematic. I dealt with political art, so you can't help bringing yourself along. There is a lot in common between this installation and the previous project. What Malani is doing is also compelling the viewer to come inside.

I titled the book *In Medias Res* because that’s exactly what it is. You have to be inside it, now, and then you have the effect. It’s hard to talk about my own influences. I think it is the continuity in my work that is inevitably playing along.

DF: Do you think this intermedial way of seeing can actually feed into literary studies and cultural studies? It is a new method of engaging with the literary work, art and video installation, all combined, with curating as an additional tool.

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MB: Yes, I think you could give students the assignment to read a novel and mark the cinematic passages and then explain why. That would be a nice essay to write for literary students dealing with visuality. Then you realize how much literature is engaged with the visual, because it is. There are texts where you don’t realize it, but you constantly see it. So yes, it could absolutely feed into literary studies and cultural studies perspectives. Curating is putting things together; it is another assignment you can give them, and say: “Take from Flaubert’s novel visual descriptions; put them together and explain what the meaningfulness is.” That is a very useful exercise.

DF: What strikes me is that your preoccupation with the intermedial is close to the concern with the multimodal metaphor (for example, in advertisements) initiated, among others, by Charles Forceville. Has this been relevant for you at all?

MB: For me it’s nothing new. It’s been around since Roland Barthes’s text about advertisements. In that sense, Forceville is not doing anything new. He is applying a method. But I am constantly aware of the word and image interaction, for example, which in the cinema is totally normal. People talk and you see them. So, you have the dialogue and you have the images. It is a little more challenging with painting, and that is why the viewer has to provide the story. But there is always an interaction, and I think advertisement is actually in danger of being seen as more banal than it is, and that makes it more powerful because you don’t see what it is really doing, the way it manipulates you. If there is an advertisement for a very expensive car which says things about the make of the car in small letters, and on the hood of the car there is a beautiful woman in a bikini, you know that you will not get the woman along with the car. And yet there is emotional capitalism at work, where the desire for the woman makes you want to buy the car. That is beyond what the written word will say, because it will not want to declare that. But the connec-

tion must be made to understand the far-reaching social consequences of emotional capitalism.

DF: I would like you to comment on my favourite painting, *Separation*. When I looked at it I realized that the book I had studied previously, *The Whirlpool* by Jane Urquhart, would connect beautifully with this because there is a man imagining himself to be in love with a woman but for him the woman is actually the landscape. There is a confusion between the two, which we get in this painting by Munch. Could you comment on this?

MB: Yes, I don't know that novel. But in *Separation* the severance between the man and the woman is the anecdote, but what you see is the woman disappearing, merging into the landscape. She becomes the landscape. Her hair goes into the trees. Her dress merges into the path that leads away from the man. So, *Separation* is more than her leaving him. She fades away, and that is what you have with a separation: you are slowly taken away into another life. She goes into another life, and he doesn't have any grip on her any more. The real separation is her fading into the landscape rather than the fact that she leaves him. So, it is also a vision of landscape and human subjectivity and the danger of its disappearing or being effaced. There is continuity with what we have seen at the exhibition.

DF: I want to ask you about major surprises that happened while you were dealing with *Emma & Edvard*, because I am sure that the whole process was rich in surprises for you.

MB: Well, as you know the whole video installation had already existed before I knew I would be invited to this. Actually, the invitation came with the request to integrate *Madame B* into the work by Munch from the museum's holdings. They had eleven hundred paintings, and I chose eighty; so I had a good choice. The big surprise, first of all, was to get to know Munch. I had no more than a superficial knowledge of his work, from some exhibitions I had seen. I knew he was important, but I had not discovered it yet. So, I first made a tentative selection and then I went to the storage to look at all those paintings and then decided I'd take this one, and leave that one alone. And that was because there was a surprise in each one. Take *The Drowned Boy* where you see that horse outlined in the lower left front. It took me a long time to see that horse. It is curved, and it is turning around to bring us in. Its body is turning, which creates the cinematic effect: the horse is really moving towards us as if to say: "Come on in and look at this. Be a witness." And then you see two tall men who are on their way to be

witnesses. And then behind them you see the tragedy of the drowned boy. That horse was the surprise. That's an example of a big surprise, something you don't immediately see. There are other surprises, like a mask in the painting showing a man and a woman with a tree. The tree has an eye, while the man and woman don't have eyes, and what made me select that painting was the fact that I saw that the man's white face at the top had a little brown line suggesting that white was a mask. Without that brown line, you could say: "He is just a little white." But no, he's wearing a mask, and that changes the whole painting. If you look closely at these images there is always a surprise. In *Red Virginia Creeper* I don't see any creeper. I just see a house on fire. As for *Kissing Couples the Park*, the real subject is that half-face of a woman who is going out of the frame because she has no one to kiss. So, I selected each painting because there was something that I saw that went against the criticism, either immediately or after a long time of looking. This is, again, why I wanted the paintings to be hung low, and as many benches as possible provided. So that people can have the same experience that I had in the storage. Take your time with the paintings. The major surprise may be that looking at a painting takes as much time as reading a novel or seeing a video. If you sit and watch a fifteen-minute film, why don't you look for fifteen minutes at a painting?

DF: Thank you very much for your innovative and illuminating exhibition. It was a real privilege to hear you talk about it in the Munch Museum.

EMMA & EDVARD



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Sensing the Present:
“Conceptual Art of the Senses”

ABSTRACT

After Rachel E. Burke briefly introduces the essays presented with a focus on our contemporary relationship to modern subjectivity, Mieke Bal will make the case for the sense of presentness on an affective and sensuous level in Munch’s paintings and Flaubert’s writing by selecting a few topics and cases from the book *Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*, published by the Munch Museum in conjunction with the exhibition *Emma & Edvard*. It is this foregrounded presentness that not only produces the ongoing thematic relevance of these works, but more importantly, the sense-based conceptualism that declares art and life tightly bound together. If neither artist eliminated figuration in favour of abstraction, they had a good reason for that. Art is not a representation of life, but belongs to it, illuminates it and helps us cope with it by sharpening our senses. As an example, a few paintings will clarify what I mean by the noun-qualifier “cinematic” and how that aesthetic explains the production of loneliness.

Keywords: senses, abstraction, writing, affect, aesthetic.

INTRODUCTION

Rachel E. Burke

What is our relationship, in 2017, to the notion of the modern subjectivity?

The question is not what can modern subjects tell us—famed characters from Gustave Flaubert to Friedrich Nietzsche have been well-mined in this regard—but what can our approach to them, our explorations of a temporal *then* from a temporal *now*, reveal that has not already been said? This group of essays takes an interdisciplinary approach to these relationships, examining how history is constantly reshaped by the conditions of a present innately inflected by the past, and how these negotiations are staged between artworks from the cusp of modernity and contemporary audiences. Emerging from the *Modern Sensibilities* conference in March held at the Munch Museet in conjunction with the exhibition *Emma & Edvard: Love in the Time of Loneliness* (27 January–17 April 2017) curated by Mieke Bal, the following essays address how figures such as Flaubert and Edvard Munch mediate a contemporary relationship to modernity.

Bal, continuing to press into the productivity of anachronistic looking encouraged by her exhibition, reveals the limitations of inherited art historical lineages that square Munch away as a suffering artistic genius with a mean misogynistic streak. These legacies not only saddle the art historian with cumbersome binaries, such as that between abstraction and figuration, but also lock access to viewing pleasure and intersubjective exploration far from those without advanced and specialized education. With a masterful attention to Flaubert, Jonathan Culler demonstrates how these art historical constraints and the potential for art as a space of modern self-consciousness and self-reflexivity are born from the same motivations. His investigation of Flaubert as a case study for the construction of the modern artist, medium and subject, is expounded upon by Kristin Gjesdal, who implicates Henrik Ibsen's Hedda Gabler—and by extension the woman at the turn of modernity—as the site for the “incarnation of the modernist imperative.” Why is it that Hedda, like her French compeer Emma Bovary, reflects the restless, pacing nature of her modern masculine creator in feminine form? Certainly, as Ernst van Alphen argues, they constitute subjective, rather than objective, interpretations of the object-world—apparitions rippling with the new modern challenges to human attention and subjecthood—that question prevailing contemporary attitudes towards modern subjectivities.

Miguel Ángel Hernández Navarro pushes even farther, suggesting that modern subjectivity, and indeed contemporary subjectivity, is shaped by specific temporal experiences in addition to sensory experiences. His proposal that “art constitutes an interruption, a place for resistance” is put

into virtual action by Griselda Pollock, whose examination of Charlotte Salomon via Nietzsche and Munch collapses art historical conventions erected to promote certain masculine mythologies. It seems, therefore, that reconstructing a contemporary relationship to modernity means coming to terms with the modern woman, confronting, as Patricia G. Berman articulates, the gendered experience of vulnerability. This is just but one aspect of what we have to discover, just one fragment of our contemporary reflection, exposed over the course of learning to recognize our reflections as “seeing sideways . . . seeing an image (what we see) but not the picture (what it depicts),” to use Berman’s terms. Ultimately, the following series of essays maps the power of visual dialogue, consciously anachronistic looking and, most importantly, how such exchange sustains permeability and the social spheres in which subjectivities are formed.

CONCEPTUAL ART OF THE SENSES

Mieke Bal

CONNECTIONS

This analysis concerns the Munch-Flaubert and “us” connections. Here, “us” refers to the viewers and readers situated in the present of art from the past, as well as to Michelle Williams Gamaker and myself as makers of the contemporary works in the exhibition; and the connections between the art world and the academic world. I hope the latter connection especially will be strengthened by this publication of the papers of the conference. I will address the idea of *connectivity* as the central concern, the conception of art that was the basis of my curation of the exhibition. Connection is neither conflation nor comparison, and can occur in many different ways. This leads to a few well-known starting points.¹

First, connections across the borders of the fields, specializations and disciplines inevitably invoke the term *interdisciplinary*, and that is what this ensemble of articles certainly is, with authors from literary studies, art history, philosophy, and myself from what I call “cultural analysis” and video art making. According to Roland Barthes’s brief description of it, interdisciplinarity produces a *new* object, and this object belongs to no one. No turf policing, then; “Munch” as I consider and have construed

¹ See my book that accompanied the exhibition (*Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*). On the exhibition, see the interview with Dorota Filipczak in this issue.

him, or it, for this occasion, belongs to no one. This also holds, secondly, for the temporal dimension of the connections. Whatever the time and place it was made, art belongs to and functions in the present; the here-and-now where we consider it worth considering. Commonplace as this view may seem by now, I seek to have tried to draw out its consequences for the practice of exhibiting. An exhibition is a meeting ground for that here-and-now of art with the people who come to see and consider it. And to the connections already mentioned, thirdly, exhibitions add that among works themselves. Curating is bringing works in one another's proximity, so that they can mutually speak to one another, thus modifying the sense and effect of each. Edvard Munch, it seems, would agree with me on this.

In the catalogue for the exhibition *eMunch.no: Text and Image* (2012), Hans-Martin Flaatten discussed the exhibitionary effect on the artist himself of a combination of paintings now belonging (but not then!) to what became a series after the fact, *The Frieze of Life*. Flaatten writes: "Later in life, Munch pointed out that he came up with the idea to begin work on what would become *The Frieze of Life* when he saw his paintings collected in exhibitions," and he continues, quoting the artist: "When they [the paintings] were placed together immediately a resonance rang through them and they became totally different than when they stood individually. It became a symphony. Then I decided to paint friezes" (139). In other words, the artist was influenced by the exhibition, as much as the exhibition was an assemblage of his paintings. That phrase, "becoming totally different than when they stood individually," articulates the difference between an art work as, say, a collector's item, masterpiece or emblem of an artist's *oeuvre*, from such a work as part of an exhibition and altered by it. Combining images regardless of chronology and biography—an intervention in the historical bias of mainstream art history on which Miguel Ángel Hernández Navarro and Griselda Pollock have much more to say in their contributions—I thus followed Munch's insight when making groupings in this exhibition. These are based thematically, or for comparison, or creating small narratives. As I wrote in the book, curating can be considered a medium in its own right—a medium that produces what Munch called "resonances." And like all mediums, the subject of the act of curating must therefore take responsibility for the way it *frames* the artworks. In this exhibition, the primary framing was the suggestion of mutual connections, or resonances, between Munch and Flaubert, or, rather, Emma and Edvard. The groupings I had made follow in the wake of that primary framing.

If, soon after the publication and smashing success of his novel *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert was taken to court, the prosecution was motivated by the sense that the novel was *doing* something to the culture

of the day—it was conducting its own interrogation of the present. They seemed to panic about the welfare of their culture, and so targeted the sentence that reversed the generally accepted morality, considered dangerous because it was taken to entice people, especially women, to indulge in adultery. This sentence, “Oh yes, if only . . . before the *filth* of marriage and the *disillusions* of adultery . . .” (II, 15; emphasis added), uttered by the narrator and clearly—but perhaps not exclusively—focalized by Emma, hurt the not-yet-quite-modern sensibility of the prosecutor and his motivators.²

Moralistic as this view is, let’s not yet laugh too loudly, because it does broach the question of art and its relationship to society. The implication is that it combined an idea for consideration—that marriage is “filthy,” even if adultery also disappoints—with an effect that we can consider sensuous—people would actually be enticed to desire and—god forbid!—act upon that desire, with the demise of standard morality as a consequence. It would be *performative*, and given the topic, it would function almost as pornography, which is addictive. If Flaubert won his case and was acquitted, it is allegedly because his cheeky argument that his novel was art, not reality, convinced the judges. This defense was successful because the judges fell for a false binary opposition between “art” and “life.” But what that meant was not so clear. For “art” could be said to be more, not less dangerous, in the sense of being more enticing; more performative and thus, sensuous, than, say, journalism, art’s opposite. At least, art such as Flaubert’s and Munch’s.³

In Flaubert’s project, the prose of a novel had to be as poetic as a poem; every word, even every sound counted. He read all his drafts out loud to “taste” the sounds. If, nevertheless, he wrote one of the world’s most powerful novels with a strong content, a pre-Marxist critique of emerging capitalism, a pre-Freudian understanding of hysteria and a pre-feminist critique of women’s confinement, it is because language *cannot* be severed from life. Instead of writing abstract poems, as the *l’art-pour-l’art* poets of his day tried to do, he made every sound count as much as every event, vision or—his primary material—quotations without quotation marks

² Given how many editions and translations of this most famous of novels circulate, I refer to parts and chapters, rather than pages. I have used the 1971 edition for the French, and the most widely read translation by Francis Steegmuller for the English. Where necessary, I consulted the translation by Eleanor Marx Aveling published by de Man. On the trial, see LaCapra. On this, see also Culler in this issue. On the question of whose focalization is represented, see Culler (*Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*). This groundbreaking book is still the best study on Flaubert’s writing I know.

³ On performativity, see Culler (“The Performative”) and Bal (*Travelling Concepts*).

(Barthes) in his multi-layered prose. He refused to choose between form and content. And so did Munch, who pursued an obsessive content while wildly experimenting with painting styles.

I borrow the phrase “conceptual art of the senses” of my subtitle from a highly illuminating passage in the book, *Munch in His Own Words*, by the Danish museum director and art critic Poul Erik Tøjner. As the fabulous Munch scholar Patricia G. Berman also does in a recent article in *Kunst og Kultur*, Tøjner wrote powerfully about the work of the surface in Munch’s paintings—the intermedial equivalent of Flaubert’s “tasting” the sounds. Jonathan Culler explains in his contribution how it was possible that a novel with such a banal, sordid anecdote as its storyline could become an enduringly relevant novel, inspiring generations of writers and artists. Suffice it to say that the anecdote may be banal, but the story as constructed is far from it. The conceptual side of both the paintings and the novel concerns such aspects as the relationship to the viewer or reader, the time and environment of encountering, and the sensuous, tactile aspect as an idea on art. This is the concept, and the art—the paint, the surface, the sounds, metaphors, descriptions—makes that concept “of the senses”—effective and impacting, perhaps changing or confirming and implicating the position of the viewer or reader. And the senses, among which primarily but not exclusively the sense of sight, cannot function in another than the *present tense*.

This does not mean, not at all in fact, that the history, the past in which these works were made, is irrelevant. But the past travels along with the sensuousness of the works and is constantly transformed by it. Sensuousness itself is in ongoing transformation, hence, an object of history. Thus, as Ernst van Alphen explains in his contribution, the culture of distraction that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century had a huge impact on the sense-experience in the period from where the artworks of Munch and Flaubert stem. And the consequences of the transformation, or crisis as he calls it, of the senses as a tool for experience are still with us, in the ever-increasing “distractive” culture. This is not at all the logic of chronology but an accumulative conception of time. Herein lies the “conceptual art of the senses” of our video work; which refrains from either reconstructing the past as a remote “foreign country” as David Lowenthal had it in 1985, nor places Emma’s sad story exclusively in the present, as if forgetting the continuity with ups and downs, or the resurfacing of the mid- and late-nineteenth century and its obsessions. Instead, Michelle Williams Gamaker and I have merged, in blatant anachronism, two eras, and the space in-between. The respective eras of Flaubert and Munch are neither the source nor the cause of the situation today but nor are they disconnected. Among

the elements of the earlier time that resurface later is the idea of love—an obsession Emma and Edvard share. The astounding intensity of the prose in which Flaubert described Emma’s sexual experience and its aftermath matches what binds the philosophy of love, as Kristin Gjesdal discusses it, to the creative, fictional works of, in her case, in another intermediality, Ibsen and Munch. This is a different understanding of conceptual art of the senses. In the remainder of this paper I will elaborate just a few examples. They resonate due to the concept of the aesthetic underlying the exhibition, “the cinematic.”

THE CINEMATIC

I explain this concept, not in discourse but visually, and with Munch and Flaubert as the theorists of it. The three paintings that were hung in the back of the first, introductory room are the site of an ambiguity that, I will argue, leads beyond figuration, or figuration only. It moves in a direction that makes their art so different as to be qualified as modern. The word cinematic does not directly refer to the cinema as a technology or art form, but is derived from the Greek verb for “to move,” *kinein*. Obviously, Munch’s painting often represents movement, both bodily and emotional. It also proposes, in its wayward seriality, a possibility to look at different paintings as if they were frames or photograms, together animating a situation of movement and transformation. Also, the material paint itself seems in movement, with hasty brushstrokes, leaving the canvas visible, and at other times with thick strokes that leave the movement of the paint matter visible; a surface that seems uneven, unstable, quivering. And “quivering” (*frémissant*) is the qualifier Flaubert used to explain the demand he placed upon his writing, in his correspondence (fig. 1).

I locate the moving quality first, obviously, in the intimation of movement. The second meaning of movement comes from the act of perception. Perception is a selection by the perceiving subject and that subject’s memories; and thus, move between present and past sensations. The third meaning of movement is affective. This is supported by the synesthetic nature of seeing, and the importance especially of tactility and hearing. The last meaning is the result of this: the potential to move us to action in the social-political domain.

But movement alone is still too vague for an understanding of the cinematic. More precisely, in Munch’s work the allusive hints in eyes and facial expressions of figures suggest they can change at any moment, the figures play-acting rather than posing, and the scenes fugitive moments in a longer process. In this sense—due to the play with layering, perspective

and flickering light—even the skin of the works evokes the cinematic. The format of the canvases that cuts figures in half suggests a camera that is limited in what it can frame, as well as figures who are moving out of the frame. Viewers are compelled to make up what will happen next or what has just happened, as if watching a movie.

Of the monumental painting *Workers on Their Way Home* from 1913–14, several critics have alleged the cinematic quality, especially in the context of the exhibition *The Modern Eye* from 2012. I find the montage of different “takes” most remarkable in this respect. The three main figures seem to have been “shot” from different angles. The man on the left from the front, is shot frontally, and he arrests his movement. The middle one is taken from above, and still walks but may be considering to stop (for the camera). And the right-hand one, shot slightly from the side, carries on pushing whatever it is he is pushing. This makes the image a montage of three takes, and individualizes the workers, which is a political aspect. This, in addition to the steep, elongated perspective characteristic of many Munch paintings, and which here foregrounds the movement of the stream of people on the right, and the fewer and smaller ones on the left who walk in the opposite direction. Munch’s play with perspective is another way of suggesting a camera, of trying out different angles. Sometimes the elongation is the most remarkable element; sometimes the exaggerated height is what makes the perspective seem longer. This is Munch’s way of drawing attention to the dilemma of painting: as an image, it is flat; as a picture, in the sense of depiction, it attempts to achieve the illusion of three-dimensionality. Exaggerating this is a way of checking our tendency to be taken in by the realistic illusion. In this sense, a certain self-reflexivity hints at a postmodern aesthetic.⁴

Perhaps the most emphatically cinematic detail is the cropped and shadowy, semi-transparent left-over of a figure on the far left. I must confess it took sitting on the bench frontally contemplating the low-hung painting to see it—when the figure’s shoe almost hit me. And now that I have seen it I cannot un-see it. I cannot take lightly this thing—not a figure but a trace of a figure, who was present before the “take” but now is already gone. An after-image in the image. This happens in film, not in painting, one would expect.

In his book *Film Form* (1949), Russian avant-garde filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948) explains his ideas about montage through Flaubert’s novel *Madame Bovary*, the famous scene of the *comices agricoles*,

⁴ On postmodernism in Flaubert, see Schor and Majewski. I have not found a publication on Munch as a postmodernist.

the annual market during which Rodolphe seduces Emma and becomes her first lover. Eisenstein analyzes the discourses that intermingle, of the officials and the would-be lovers, as an audio montage (12–13). For him, montage is conflict, tension. This idea of montage helps us understand an aspect of Munch's painting that has been noticed but not further examined in its consequences for, in particular, the political tenor of the painting. I call this aspect "mistakes."

"Mistakes" are characteristic of Munch, as well as Flaubert. The devices I discuss here are mistakes in relation to a norm of technical perfection, according to the standards of realism. Instead, they attract attention to the medium itself. On the part of the artist, shifts, errors, glitches, blurs, bad cropping and mistakes in perspectival drawing are all examples of a movement from one image to another that deploys the technical elements of the medium to make a change. Artists have always cultivated the boldness of daring to make what would be considered mistakes by, for instance, conservative critics. Such mistakes can have an avant-gardist flavour. Wilful mistakes make viewers consider the medium. Certain mistakes are specifically cinematic. The kind of mistakes Munch makes in his paintings, Flaubert in his writing, and Williams Gamaker and I in our videos have double effects; one self-reflectively medium-oriented, and one specific, generating meaning for the work at hand.

The tongue-in-cheek word "mistake" makes visible how traditionalist judges censor innovations, while making their judgements appear self-evident and without the possibility of questioning them. In Flaubert, this kind of strategy of errors can use verb tense incongruities to shock readers into paying attention to the texture of the work and its peculiarly cinematic temporality—his equivalent of the attention to flatness in Munch. In painting, the cinematic quality can also be enhanced by the fact that the image quality seems due to a camera that limits depth of field. It is almost as if we see camera movement and change of focus—two notorious mistakes in filming that, along with cropping, can also be used to enhance certain aspects and meanings. In this respect, the painter is freer than the cinematographer. He can, and does, vary with sharpness and blur regardless of how the depth of field justifies it, whether it is shallow or deep. When the cropping becomes excessive and the image semi-transparent, and one eye is diamond-shaped, the other squarely square, we can assume the artist is pushing his liberty for a purpose. When seen as cinematic, this becomes a self-reflective device (fig. 2).

An example in Flaubert's novel comparable to Munch's variations of "camera handling" is the first sentence of chapter 5 of the third part of *Madame Bovary*. Emma has just begun her liaison with Léon. She has plotted

a way of seeing him weekly, under the pretext of piano lessons (III, 5). This is our scene 7, Loving Léon. “C’était le jeudi” (“It was Thursdays”) begins the chapter. The verb tense indicates routine. The detailed narration of the small events that precede the encounter with her lover, all in the imparfait of routine, are plausible enough as iterations.

The passage ends, however, with the following sentence that, in isolation, could be considered a grammatical mistake: “Puis, d’un seul coup d’oeil, la ville apparaissait” (“Then, in a blink of an eye, the city would appear”; my translation). The suddenness implied in the adverbial clause is contradicted by the tense of routine. Normally, an indication of suddenness can interrupt a routine description, but not the other way around. Routine, by definition, cannot interrupt; it lacks temporal agency. Preceding this sentence is a clause that explains the apparent contradiction: “. . . afin de se faire des surprises, elle fermait les yeux” (“. . . in an attempt to surprise herself, she would close her eyes”). In self-deception, Emma tries desperately to recover the excitement of a liaison that, barely begun, already bores her. We have attempted to make this tangible by filming reiterated beginnings of the amorous meetings in the same hotel room, and showing the difference between the initial excitement and the subsequent boredom on Emma’s face. Using her face as a projection screen is our way of rendering the subjectivity of the narrative prose.

With Munch’s help, I have also attempted to bring a cinematic aspect in for the exhibition itself, in space, and this, not only by integrating the moving images of our videos. Take room 4, titled “Loneliness.” An oblique line goes from the video of Emma’s wedding to *The Wedding of the Bohemian* (fig. 3), the poster image of the exhibition. In both wedding scenes, we see a woman who is lonely in company, at what is supposed to be the happiest day of her life. The wedding becomes a death sentence, the day the beginning of a relentlessly ongoing social isolation. This is an example of the mutual framing I mentioned earlier, but it also literally *moves* the visitor, both to bodily traverse the room and to have compassion. Moreover, this line is crossed by another axis formed between three eminently cinematic paintings, their effect derived from steep perspective and, especially for the two most clearly opposite each other, from cropping. An example is the man on the right of the room (fig. 4). His cropped face, which looks straight at the viewer, emanates a sense of horror—a horror pursuing him from behind—the house that seems to be either on fire or bleeding. The man runs into our arms, or toward the other side of the room, into the arms of the woman on the right, who is likewise frontally leaving the frame (fig. 2). Little is left of her after the cropping, which sug-

gests an even faster pace. She also seems to run for her dear life, under the curatorially-produced influence of the man across from her.

Another example of curatorial cinematicity is the way I undercut the star status of the famous *Madonna* to liberate the work from its reputation by making its cinematic quality stand out, inserting it in a row of paintings in the room called “Fantasies” (fig. 5). It is now simply one of a small row of four paintings, like four film frames. The film I have construed, if we go counter-clockwise, is an erotic one, but not a merely semi-pornographic appeal to taking possession. The narrative is more ambiguous than that. Increasingly naked, the first (from right to left, as the visitor was invited to go) with a transparent top, the second is *Madonna*. Framed between the woman in red and the one with one sore nipple and her skirt pulled down by, supposedly, hands that try to grab her, the woman in *Madonna* appears to be at least ambiguous, not the cock-teaser nor the ecstatic woman having an orgasm while conceiving a child, as she tends to be seen, but either willingly or unwillingly having her top pulled off, or, if supine, being spied upon in sleep. The sequence ends on a weeping woman, with the same blue skirt, so potentially identifiable as the one being harassed. And after a “fade-to-black,” in the form of a gap, the larger *Kiss* culminates the ambiguity: a happy ending, or a warning that the consequence of “love” can well be losing your face, your personality. All this is, of course, a curatorial fantasy, the building blocks of which are “images of women” bound together by the fictitious focalizer Edvard.

A third example of cinematic curating is the older, sideways-looking Edvard in room six, “In the Deep,” whose slight squint suggests he is witness to the tragedies unfolding in the world outside, on his right (for the visitor) or left (for the figure) (fig. 6). Again, Munch leads the way, when he inserts on the lower left, in the third of these paintings of tragedy, a skeletal horse, barely visible and transparent, bending his body to look the visitor in the eye, something that Munch’s humanoids rarely do. The animal’s eyes beckon the viewer to look with the two men whose faces we cannot see, who are witnessing the drowning in *The Drowned Boy*, as opposed to the situation in the *Drowning Child*, where a death occurred because other people didn’t bother to see. I’ll return to this painting in a bit. In these scenes of tragedy, I have attempted to insert a view of Edvard, the older Edvard, as compassionate. Although in this sequence this is due to the curating, in this, too, I follow Munch’s lead. I have already suggested that Edvard is not simply the inveterate misogynist he has often been taken to be, when speaking of my construction of a sequence of fantasies that could harbour a measure of sadism but also compassion for the woman who, in

The Hands, is assaulted and who then, semi-denuded wearing a blue skirt in the juxtaposed painting, seems to weep in the aftermath.

In the famous work *Puberty*, a compassionate view has been noticed by others, most notably feminist philosopher Ingeborg Owesen. She writes about the *Puberty* painting that Munch “demonstrates an uncanny ability to empathise with woman’s fate and situation, in this instance by depicting an adolescent with keen sympathy and understanding, a far cry from the Lolita-type object of male lust” (302–03). And the most compassionate expressions of empathy are the ones I have mentioned regarding my curatorial cinematic constructions, *The Wedding of the Bohemian*, *Kissing Couples in the Park* where the main figure has no one to kiss, and let me add the lithographs of *The Lonely Ones*. This resonates with Flaubert’s empathy for Emma, present throughout the novel but relevant here when, in the merry crowd of the party, she is so alone that her gestures predict her suicide.

Earlier I proposed that the surfaces, *quivering* with unequal brush strokes, thin and thick paint, and interventions by natural wear and tear give the surfaces as such a cinematic feel; for they seem to be in movement. This work with surface is Munch’s way of experimenting with his medium; the way Flaubert does it with incongruous comparisons, verb tenses that verge on the a-grammatical and montages of takes. I would like to end this section with one example where the moving canvas indicates a self-reflection on the medium that gives the lie to those binary thinkers who believe Munch was not radical enough because he never gave up figuration in favor of abstraction (as Prelinger wrote in her otherwise illuminating book). For me, the experiments with, as well as within, figuration and in its relationship with what we can call abstraction (but should not see as figuration’s opposite), are what makes Munch’s painting more, rather than less, radical than his cubist and abstract contemporaries.

Once more I call on Tøjner to speculate about the depth-surface tension: “Munch is saved by his belief in the surface: there can hardly be any doubt that it is the depths, rather than the surface, which destroy—the terrible abyss. One is stifled, one loses everything, one perishes, one drowns, one becomes invisible, one falls and falls and—probably worst of all—nobody notices” (46). The last words, “worst of all, nobody notices,” constitute the connection between this group of paintings and the previous one, where a child drowned.

In this painting, probably from 1904, the child is doomed by the indifference of the bystanders (fig. 7). Still on the surface, held up by the air in her skirt, she will soon be pulled under and die. Between the minuscule people busying themselves on the pier and the child in her final seconds is

a high wall of indifference—the wall of the pier which, if we consider it on its own, is an abstract painting. Thick and thin paint, even a blob of pure pigment matter, and bare canvas all contribute to the “abstraction effect.”

HANDS-ON

If we now turn to the opposite corner of the room, we can see that this play with surface and depth, abstraction and figuration, and additionally, the centrality of poorly depicted hands, is at its most radical in the monumental *Self-Portrait with a Bottle of Wine*, his most poignant expression of loneliness (fig. 8). It is appealing to draw attention to the inward-directed gaze of the eyes and the strange figuration of two men, waiters looking like death, who stand back to back and, in a flat surface reading, look as though they come out of Edvard’s shoulders, figuring by contrast the togetherness he lacks, or a split personality; their backs are turned to each other. Their small scale is due to the perspectival exaggeration.

The dejected body posture also indicates hopelessness. The exaggerated perspective hems the figure in. The colours look fiery, producing a sense of inner turmoil. But the other aspect that can help us make sense of the work beyond the compassionate sense of witnessing is the brushwork and the colour composition. With thanks to Patricia G. Berman (personal communication), the wine glass on the right foreground can be read as leaning ever so slightly inward toward the seated figure, vectored away from the painting’s frame. The space between that glass and Edvard’s inert and paddle-like hands adds to the pathos of the image. Edvard’s suit is green and black, a worked-up surface that makes the fabric seem to move like a shimmering “changeant” fabric and the sagging shoulders more static than would fit that movement. This further complicates the flatness-figuration dynamic. The orange behind the chair makes no figurative sense, other than being fiery, hence, a potential bearer of inner turmoil. The tablecloths are clearly meant to be white, but there is barely any white among the nuances of blue. And then, there are those hands.

The point of their togetherness is to be slack, useless, both central and a-centric. The hands appear central because they are at the front of that perspective, even touching the tablecloth so as to slightly curve its lower edge. The hands serve no purpose, and that may well be to express how colour fields pre-empt the figurative energy we tend to bring to even this depiction of limpness. I propose that the best approach to this painting is to finally give up the difference between figuration and abstraction. The tablecloths are suitable for making us realize that this is in the first place an invitation to look abstractly. Only if, overcoming the predominance of

a sentimentalizing compassion, we dare to do so, can we see the absurdly non-figurative orange field behind the back of the chair, distracted from the dejected face. In surface tension, the figure sits on a colour field, orange with nuances of brown that bring it to life. If not, the man is actually burning.

Munch deploys many aspects within figurative art that hint at abstraction, the combination of which makes the paintings what they are. When form is no longer the subject of mimetic representation, what is left to gather meaning is colour. For example, Swiss painter and theorist Johannes Itten (1888–1967) included temporality in his theory of colour. With the term “successive contrast” he proposed that the brain creates complimentary after-images of the colours we see. Joseph Albers developed the concept of “interaction of colour.”

In line with Munch’s practice I see colour as a mode of painting that adds to instead of subtracting from figuration; inflecting, transforming, sometimes curbing it. On the condition that we stop seeing figuration in realist, historical and biographical terms, we can see that the use of colour in *Self-Portrait with a Bottle of Wine* is, in fact, a kind of figuration rather than a tool or helpmate, subordinated to it. Without taking colour into account it becomes impossible to see how the figure is locked into the planes of his space. That, more than his inward eyes, solicits compassion.

The blue “white” tables in *Self-Portrait with a Bottle of Wine* press the brooding figure to the edge of the picture plane, almost pushing him out, alluding to the lens. I see such cropping as a suspension of linear perspective and the illusion of spatial wholeness and possessiveness it entails. Instead of the scientifically sanctioned tool of linear perspective, the painter used colour and cropping to make three-dimensionality within narrow or shallow spaces. In this view, light colours push forward, dark ones draw backward. The dark green that suggests the man’s suit is also a dark colour that presses him backwards into the fire, yet also, due to the cropping, forwards into our arms. This colour-dimensionality is not so much depth, seen as receding, as it is volume, seen as advancing. Instead of delivering space for the encompassing eye, it prods objects for the touch. As a result, perspective in this self-portrait becomes an inflection and emulation of linear perspective, transforming perspective’s meaning from possession to relationality. Hence, the sense that the figure is pushed towards us, very close, almost falling into our laps.

Another aspect of abstraction, related to the sense of “taking out of,” is *inattention* (more about this in Ernst van Alphen’s contribution). The paradoxical consequence is a distraction from the motif to the painterly realization. This figural distraction leads to attention to the paint for its own sake;

to materiality, consistent with Munch's wilful neglect of his paintings when he left them outside for months to be affected by the weather. He wished the surface to be disturbed, so that we would look at it with more attention.

The patch of orange behind the figure is doing it all: working by colour relation—orange as related to, complementary of, yet firmly distinguished from the brown of the chair and the green of the suit—it eats into the otherwise neat (albeit exaggerated) perspective. It distracts from the dejected figure, thus enticing us into inattention, then into a realization of what we do, giving up on compassion and looking at a colour patch instead. And once concentrated on that patch, precisely because it eats into the chair, it becomes a clear *figuration* of fire. From colour alone, the abstract orange becomes not a figuration but a sign—where there is orange, there is fire. Yet, at the same time, the orange remains just that: a patch of colour.

Munch proposed a continuous experimental, *mobile* mode of painting. The orange, remaining pigment while signifying fire, is so meaningful because fire also hovers between thing and event, thus bringing in the ambiguity between duration and instantaneousness. I consider this patch of orange an emblem, or a *mise-en-abyme* of Munch's painting. Once more this brings Munch close to Flaubert, who proposed his vision of emotional capitalism in a prose that hurt logical minds and made language opaque. The surface of the text and the taste of the sounds get the agency Berman ascribes to Munch's surfaces: with an indispensable broadening the meanings of the surface to body, agent, membrane and projection.

After having been distracted from the sad figure and diverting our gaze to the orange patch, we then look from the one to the other. The durational, interiorized gaze and the instantaneousness of the fire both come to us through the materiality of pigment. The brushstrokes become the work's "first person." We finally manage to look figuration and abstraction *together* in the eye.⁵

⁵ Making an exhibition, like making a film, is a collective endeavor—which is what I so enjoy about it. This project has come about thanks to the invaluable commitment of the people who work at the Munch Museum, the Munch-ies. I want to express my deep gratitude to all of them, and especially to the in-house co-curator Ute Falck, and the director of collection and exhibitions Jon-Ove Steihaug who invited me to curate this integrative exhibition. They have been fantastically supportive, helpful, professional and generous.

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All paintings are by Edvard Munch and are in the holdings of the Munch Museum, Oslo.



Fig. 1. *Workers on Their Way Home*, 1913–14, oil on canvas, 227 x 201 cm.



Fig. 2. *Kissing Couples in the Park*, 1904, oil on canvas, 91 x 170.5 cm.



Fig. 3. *The Wedding of the Bohemian*, 1925–26, oil on canvas, 134.5 x 178.5 cm.



Fig. 4. *Red Virginia Creeper*, 1898–1900, oil on canvas, 119.5 x 121 cm.

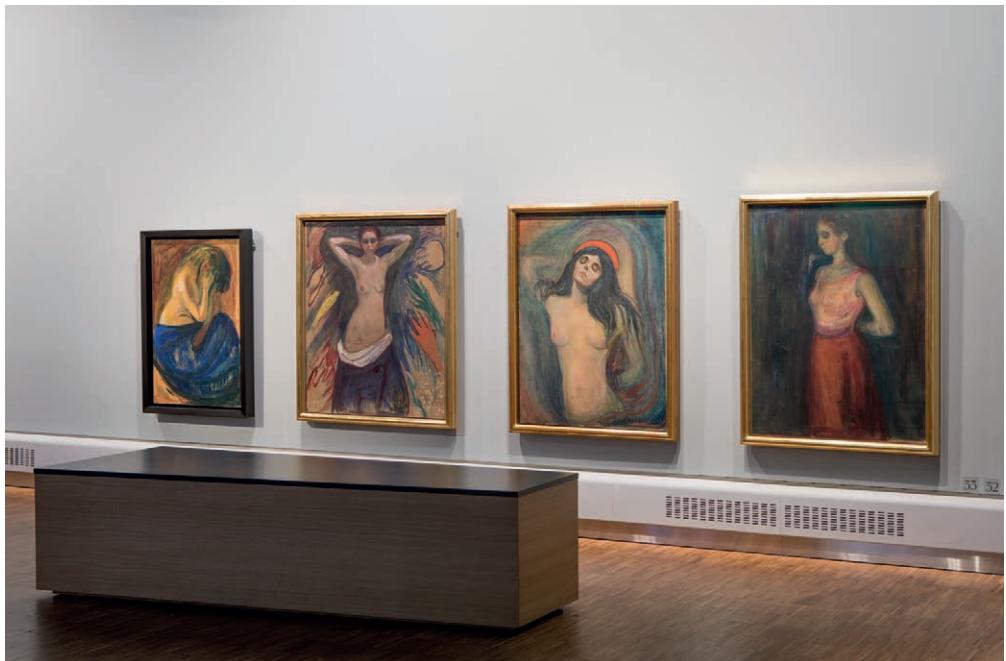


Fig. 5. Row of half-naked women (photo: Ove Kvavik):



Fig. 5a. *Study of a Model*, 1898, oil on unprimed paper, 92 x 70 cm.



Fig. 5b. *Madonna*, 1894, oil on canvas, 90 x 68.5 cm.

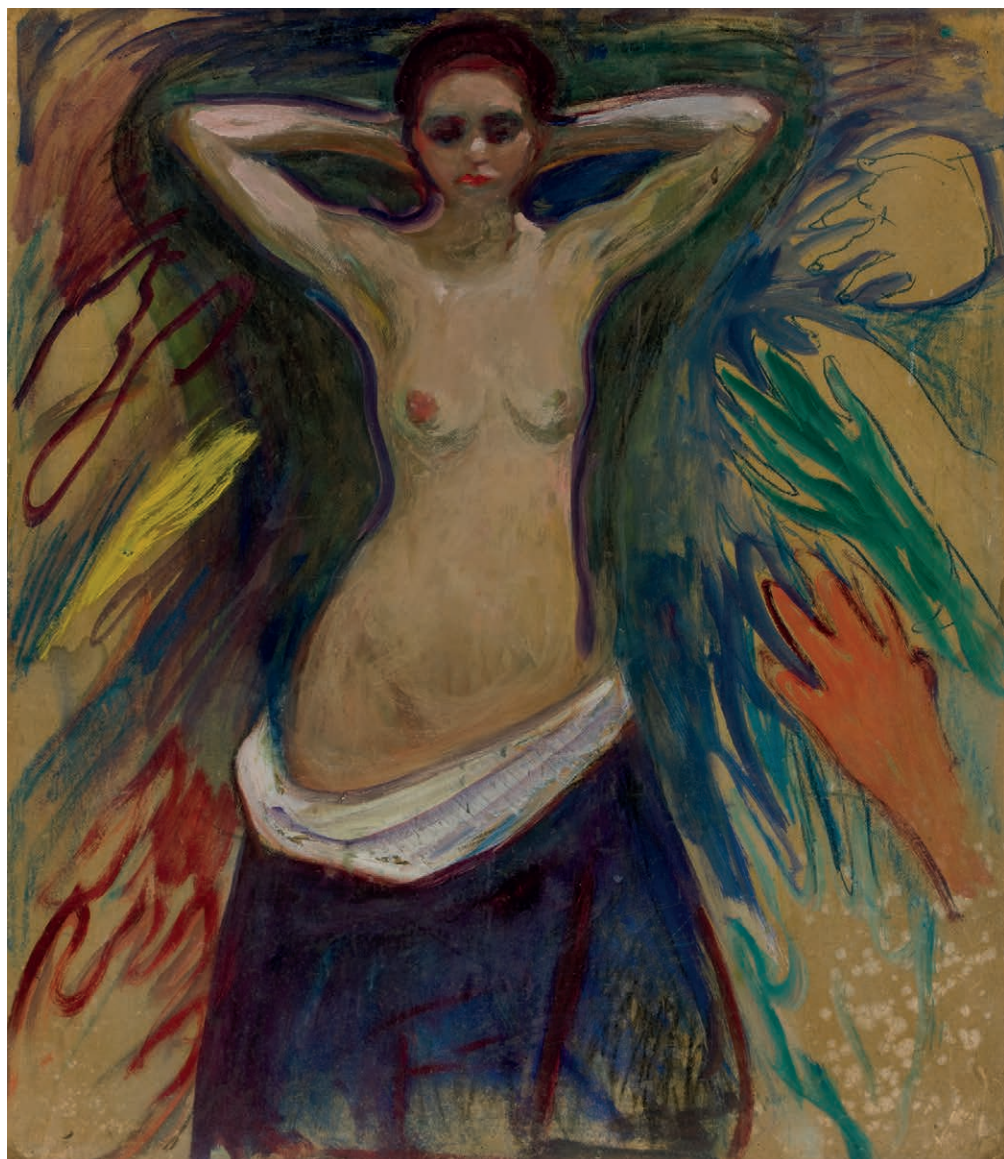


Fig. 5c. *The Hands*, 1893–94, oil and crayon on unprimed cardboard, 91 x 77 cm.

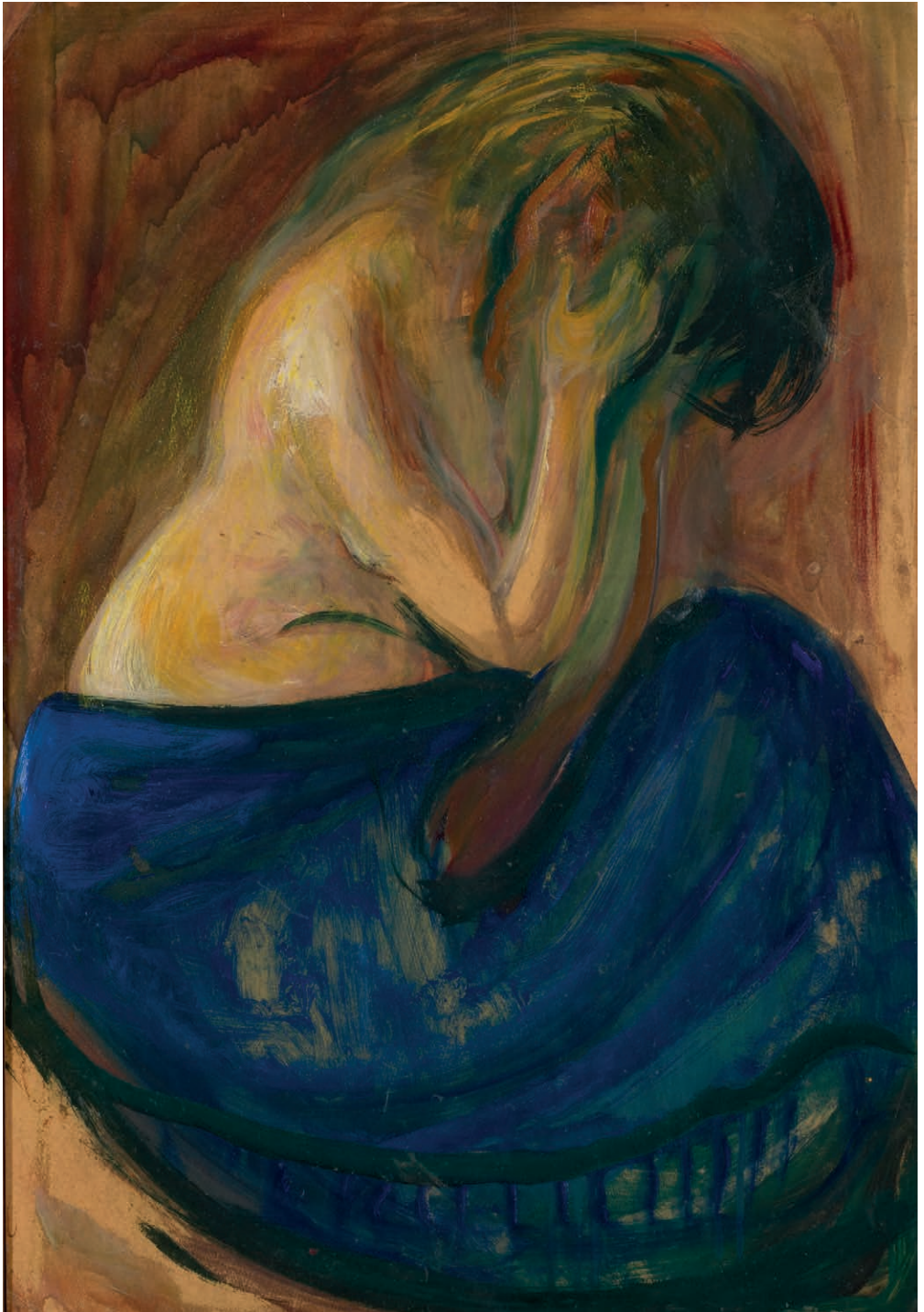


Fig. 5d. *Half-Nude in a Blue Skirt*, 1898, oil on unprimed paper, 80 x 55 cm.

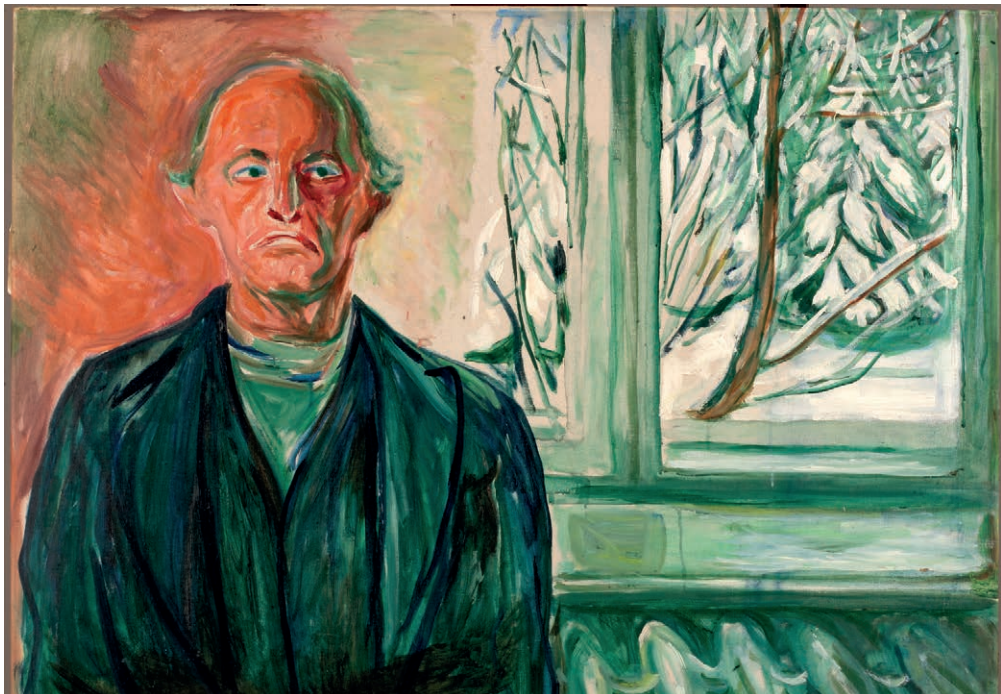


Fig. 6. *Self-Portrait by the Window*, ca. 1940, oil on canvas, 84 x 108 cm.



Fig. 7. *The Drowning Child*, 1904, oil on canvas, 70 x 92 cm.



Fig. 8. *Self-Portrait with a Bottle of Wine*, 1906, oil on canvas, 110.5 x 120.5 cm.

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Flaubert's Provocation

ABSTRACT

Madame Bovary, which was scandalous in its own day for its focus on the adultery of a provincial woman, has had a strange, complex fate. Flaubert remade the image of the novelist, as pure artist, for whom style was all that mattered, and disrupted novelistic technique, in ways that critics and writers have found exemplary, treating this as the novel novelists cannot overlook; yet for readers *Madame Bovary* is not a “book about nothing” but provides a searing portrait of provincial life and of the condition of women. The vividness and complexity of the character Flaubert created here made Emma a type: a sufferer of “Bovarysme.” Flaubert’s revolutionary notion that a trivial subject was as good as a noble subject for a serious novel was taken to be connected to the democratic notion that every human subject is as worthy as another and allowed to have desires. Yet, while promoting Emma as a valid subject of literature, equal to others, Flaubert writes against the attempt to democratize art, to make it enter every life, and renders trivial the manifestations of this subject’s desires, while making her an exemplary figure.

Keywords: Madame Bovary, novel, condition of women, provincial life, narrative technique.

It is scarcely obvious why Flaubert's tale of provincial adultery, whose heroine meets a sordid end, should have become one of the greatest novels of world literature, "the novel of all novels that the criticism of fiction cannot overlook," as the critic Percy Lubbock put it (59). What is it that makes *Madame Bovary* so special: not only scandalous in its own day (when it was brought to trial for outrage to public morals) but also stimulating for subsequent generations of writers and critics, who hold it up as exemplary for the practice of the novel, and also provocative for artists working in other media, as in the remarkable video installation, *Madame B?* Charles Baudelaire declared of *Madame Bovary*: "this book, fundamentally suggestive, could prompt a host of observations" (655).¹ And certainly the array of responses to this novel is quite fascinating.

For example, in a wonderful short story, "The Kugelmass Episode," Woody Allen describes the mid-life crisis of a neurotic New York professor, dreaming of amorous adventure, to whom a magician with a magic cabinet offers the possibility of entering the world of any novel whatsoever. Kugelmass surprisingly chooses *Madame Bovary*, getting the magician to set him down there after Emma has met Leon but before she encounters Rodolphe—*le bon moment*. The Nobel Prize-winning novelist Mario Vargas Llosa would doubtless have made the same choice. In *The Perpetual Orgy*, undertaken to "explore why *Madame Bovary* stirred me to such profound depths of my being, what it gave me that other stories could not," he writes of his unending love affair with Emma, through analysis of the book he calls the first modern novel (10). William Faulkner, whose novels are very different, apparently reread *Madame Bovary* every year; and the great American novelist, Henry James, who had serious reservations about some of Flaubert's novels, wrote that "*Madame Bovary* has a perfection that not only stamps it, but that makes it stand almost alone: it holds itself with such a supreme unapproachable assurance as both excites and defies judgment" (325). And he concluded that Flaubert is "the novelist's novelist" and "for many of our tribe at large, *the* novelist" (346, 316).

The reasons for this reputation are not far to seek. Flaubert remade the image of the artist, especially the novelist, in ways that have been crucial for the modern literary and artistic tradition. Taking what was a minor literary form, a form inferior to lyric, epic, and drama, despite its success in the hands of Stendhal and Balzac, Flaubert succeeded in making the novelist a supreme artist, with a fatal attraction to the art of language. His letters give us this image of the novelist not as an entertainer, teller of stories, but as an obsessional devotee of art.

¹ All translations from the French are mine.

It is actually quite a complicated image or conception. This novelist is not an inspired bard, though like the bard, he is marked off from the usual run of humanity—here in his devotion to a calling. He is not the vehicle through which a vision from elsewhere is transmitted; he is a craftsman, obsessional about the details of the construction of the art object, but he is not a classical craftsman, possessed of a special skill that enables him to proceed step by step, in finite progress towards a definable end, to craft the object, like a fine piece of furniture. On the contrary, for him the artistic process is interminable, by definition impossible, doomed to failure. It is not that there is a particular thing you are striving to achieve, which proves difficult; rather, the artistic condition is a commitment to strive for an impossible perfection. The artist labours mightily, day and night, but produces little—to be immensely productive would be to abandon any title to artistic integrity. In this hyperbolic condition, labouring for days to produce a few sentences is a mark of one's artistic calling, if not genius.

Sacrificing himself on the altar of art, the Flaubertian artist is often in agony, but agony comes not from the experience of the world but the creative act itself. Inexpressibility, once a property of feelings, mark of profundity, and possible source of pride, becomes an aspect of the creative act, an unending search for *le mot juste*.

Through his correspondence, Flaubert creates what is clearly a myth of the artist, an aesthetic ideology; but it is also extremely useful as an extraordinarily radical conception of the novel. The evocations of his aesthetic goals in his letters work to devalue the usual aspects of the novelistic art. Here is the most famous formulation:

What seems to me beautiful, what I would like to create, is a book about nothing, a book with no external attachment, which would be self-sustaining thanks to the force of its style, as the earth holds itself in the air without being supported, a book where there would be almost no subject or where the subject would be almost invisible, if that is possible. The most beautiful works are those where there is the least matter . . . That is why there are neither noble nor ignoble subjects, and why, from the standpoint of pure art, one might almost establish it as an axiom that there is no subject, style being in itself an absolute way of seeing things.

(Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien, un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style, comme la terre sans être soutenue se tient en l'air, un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible si cela se peut. Les oeuvres les plus belles sont celles où il y a le moins de matière . . . C'est pour cela qu'il n'y a ni beaux ni vilains

sujets et qu'on pourrait presque établir comme axiome, en se posant au point de vue de l'Art pur, qu'il n'y en a aucun, le style étant à lui tout seul une manière absolue de voir les choses.) (to Louise Colet, 16 Jan. 1852, *Correspondance* vol. 2 231)

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Here are devalued the most obvious aspects of novelistic art, plot, character, theme, structure, moral, so that Flaubert's version of the artistic ambition acquires an ascetic purity—transcendent of the usual elements of the novelist's attention. He dreams, for instance, of writing a novel where one could ignore everything else and would only have to write sentences. And this perverse purity of ambition makes him exemplary, for critics, as well as novelists, giving us something of a limit case for thinking about narrative fiction.

I'll return later to this conception of the novel and its implications, which is of great interest to writers and to critics, but for most readers, from the beginning to the present day, *Madame Bovary* has not been *un livre sur rien* but *un livre sur Emma Bovary*, as the title certainly encourages us to think. And from the beginning the novel has provoked debates about Emma's character and situation. Reviewing the novel when it appeared, Baudelaire wrote that despite the author's efforts to divest himself of his sex, "He couldn't not infuse the veins of his creature with virile blood, and Madame Bovary remains a man in everything that is most energetic and ambitious about her but also most pensive" ("il n'a pas pu ne pas infuser un sang viril dans les veines de sa créature, et Madame Bovary,—pour ce qu'il y a en elle de plus énergique et de plus ambitieux, et aussi de plus rêveur,—madame Bovary est restée un homme") (652). And he concludes: "This woman, in truth, is very sublime of her kind, in her restricted milieu and with her restricted horizon" ("Cette femme, en réalité, est très sublime dans son espèce, dans son petit milieu et en face de son petit horizon") (654). Vargas Llosa celebrates her rebellion against her restricted condition and remarks, for instance, that it is "impossible not to admire Emma's capacity for sexual pleasure" (23). Flaubert himself, on the other hand, while writing the novel, calls her "my poor Bovary" and often complains about his character: "she's of a somewhat perverse nature, a woman of false poetry and of false feelings" ("c'est une nature quelque peu perverse, une femme de fausse poésie et de faux sentiments") (to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, 30 March 1857, *Correspondance* vol. 2 696–97).

Strikingly, the novel swiftly gave rise to the concept of "Bovarysme": shortly after the publication of *Madame Bovary*, Barbey d'Aurévilly, reviewing another novel, diagnosed the heroine as lapsing into "Bovarysme," which seems to mean a combination of self-deception, casting away of

social inhibitions, and yielding to sensuality (290).² But at the end of the 19th century the term was promoted and systematized in two books by Jules de Gaultier on *Le Bovarysme*, who recuperates the afflicted subject's agency.³ Defining it as the human ability to conceive of oneself as other than one is, Gaultier identifies a sentimental or empirical "Bovarysme" and an intellectual or metaphysical version: the former a pathological state of self-deception, imagining oneself other than one is, despite the impossibility of making this image of the self a reality, but the latter a dissatisfaction to be welcomed, involving embrace of imaginative power and openness to the possibilities of the self. Flaubert himself once observed in a letter that "the measure of the soul is the dimensions of its desire" ("une âme se mesure à la dimension de son désir" (to Louise Colet, 21 May 1853, *Correspondance* vol. 2, 329).

But historically it was the first meaning of "Bovarysme" that prevailed as it was taken to sum up a type. "What distinguishes great geniuses," Flaubert wrote, "is generalization and creation. They sum up a range of personalities in a type and bring to the consciousness of humanity new characters" ("Ce qui distingue les grands génies, c'est la généralisation et la création. Ils résumant en un type des personnalités éparses et apportent à la conscience du genre humain des personnages nouveaux") (to Louise Colet, 25 Sept. 1852, *Correspondance* vol. 2 164). People can argue about whether Emma is really a new character, but certainly the vividness and complexity of the character Flaubert created here became a type for mankind.

Despite important exceptions, from Baudelaire to Vargas Llosa, the prevailing interpretation of the "Bovarysme" Emma incarnates has been negative: she haplessly confuses imagination and reality, to a pathological degree. Percy Lubbock claims that the reason *Madame Bovary* was the novel of all novels that the criticism of fiction could not overlook, is because it is "a book in which the subject is absolutely fixed and determined, so that it may be possible to consider the matter of its treatment with undivided attention" (78). That subject is Emma, who, he says, is "small and futile," but as a fixed subject that allows us to focus on the masterful novelistic treatment, then, he writes, "her futility is a real value" (Lubbock 83). For *Madame Bovary* to be a magnificent *livre sur rien*, Emma must be

² The term is actually coined by Gustave Merlet in 1860 at the end of a long essay on *Madame Bovary*, but there it relates not to Emma but to a cynical and negative vision of society.

³ *Le Bovarysme: La psychologie dans l'oeuvre de Flaubert* (1892) treats it as a pathological symptom. *Le Bovarysme* (1903) sees it rather as an important intellectual ability. See Per Buvik's "Le principe Bovaryque" in the modern editions of these books.

at its center but *n'est rien*, be nothing, a nonentity who serves to allow the artistry of the sentences to take center stage. In Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker's video installation *Madame B* Emma is also the center, but while she may suffer from a pathological condition, there is no question of making her an nonentity.

There are three issues I would like to take up here, closely related but separable for ease of discussion. The first derives from the subtitle of Flaubert's novel, "Moeurs de province," roughly "Provincial Mores." Though France is undergoing a period of transformation, Flaubert gives us an unchanging provincial world: at the beginning of part two we are told that "Since the events we are about to recount nothing, indeed, has changed in Yonville" ("Depuis les événements que l'on va raconter, rien, en effet, n'a change à Yonville") (1, 1), and Flaubert's characteristic imperfect tenses present life in these villages as ongoing, stultifying sameness, where characters conduct the same predictable conversations.⁴ (There is, strikingly, no difference between Tostes, where the Bovary's first settle, and Yonville, to which Charles moves in the hope that a change of scene will dissipate Emma's depression.) Flaubert seems to have felt strongly about the centrality of the critique of provincial life, seeing Emma as representative rather than as a special case: he wrote to Louise Colet, "My poor *Bovary* is doubtless suffering and weeping in twenty French villages at the same time, at this very moment" ("*Ma pauvre Bovary*, sans doute, souffre et pleure dans vingt villages de France à la fois, à cette heure même") (14 Aug. 1853, *Correspondance* vol. 2 392). The novel shares Emma's boredom and dissatisfaction with provincial life but offers a critical view of the specific forms that her attempts to escape from this provincial *marasme* take. *Madame B*, a transformation that speaks to today's conditions, abandons this provincial issue. There is one scene where Emma, invited to a Parisian soirée, is made to feel out of place, but this is because she appears in a very fancy ball gown, while the other party-goers are not decked out in special clothes or high fashion. While Flaubert's Emma manages escapes from Yonville to the city of Rouen, *Madame B's* Emma frequents over-the-top fashion houses in Paris. Her problem, in short, is not trying to escape from provincial life.

The second issue is not specific to provincial life but is perhaps more intense there than elsewhere. Emma plausibly blames her dissatisfaction on the condition of women in 19th century provincial France: "A man, at least, is free; he can experience different passions, different lands" ("Un

⁴ Because there are innumerable editions of *Madame Bovary*, my references give the part and chapter number.

homme, au moins est libre; il peut parcourir les passions et les pays”) (2, 3); he has possibilities of action and escape. Certainly there are no women in these villages of *Madame Bovary* with interesting or significant roles: all the other women seem content to do their duty as wives and mothers. Vargas Llosa notes this and writes that Emma’s “fate is more human and desirable than that of the other women of Yonville. She has profound experiences that they never will” (24). But in *Madame B*, as befits a modern reworking, there are women in other roles everywhere—lawyers, artists, teachers. There Emma’s problem cannot be construed as a lack of opportunity for women.

Moreover, it is notable that Flaubert’s novel is called not *Emma Bovary* (as later novels of adultery were called *Effie Briest* or *Anna Karenina*) but *Madame Bovary*. In fact, Emma is only one of three Madame Bovarys in the novel: the third, after Charles’s mother and Charles’s first wife. The title already defines her by a social role reserved for women, which she must struggle to escape. She is already a repetition, alienated in her very name, in this world where nothing changes. And Flaubert’s powerful representation of her ennui and sense of entrapment—however foolish the posited alternatives prove to be—carries great weight, for readers, male, as well as female. Although Flaubert had no interest in the emancipation of women or other progressive movements, “he takes and defines the reality of the social world, from women, from Emma, grasps her as the key point for questioning that world and demonstrating its oppressive mediocrity” (Heath 87). *Madame B*, in a brilliant stroke, has all three of the men in Emma’s life, Charles, Rodolphe, and Leon, played by the same actor, implying that they are all equivalently deficient, though each in his own particular way. For reasons one can certainly understand, it does not have all three Madame Bovarys played by the same actress, in part because that equivalency does not structure the world there being portrayed.

Madame B, eschewing the issue of the oppression of women in the provinces, takes up instead a modern problem that was already incipient in Flaubert’s world but that has come to a head in our own time: consumer capitalism, the lure of a mercantile society making commodities privileged objects of desire. I said that the problem in *Madame B* was not a lack of opportunity for women; on the contrary, consumer capitalism targets them with all too many opportunities to supposedly exercise subjectivity. *Madame B*’s Emma seeks fulfillment in frequenting over-the-top fashion houses and buying gourmet foods—the sorts of objects modern commodity culture encourages people to imagine that they will bring status and satisfaction—and of course in so doing she meets financial ruin. This was already an issue in Flaubert’s novel, but there it is more than

a matter of the excessive self-indulgence, or overindulgence that modern ideology encourages. There it is very much a class issue. At the trial of *Madame Bovary* for offense to public morals, Flaubert's defense attorney, Maître Senard, assured the judges that far from being immoral, this was a book with a moral, and the moral of the novel was that dangers lay ahead for the girl who received an education inappropriate to her class: "an education above the condition into which she was born." In this case, Senard declares,

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instead of pursuing the destiny that naturally belonged to her of being brought up for the farm where she ought to live or in a similar milieu, she is shown under the authority of a father who has the idea of having her educated in a convent, this woman born to the farm, who ought to marry a farmer, a man of the countryside. Here we see her sent to a convent outside her sphere. Mr. Flaubert sought to depict a woman who, instead of trying to settle herself in the condition that was given her by her situation, by her birth; instead of trying to make for herself the life that rightfully belonged to her, she remained preoccupied with a thousand foreign aspirations drawn from an education inappropriate for her. (Senard)

This may startle modern readers, who assume the problem is not the type of education or its appropriateness for a farm girl who should have married a farmer, who assume the problem is Emma's expectation that sentimental literature provides models to be pursued, but the class issue was a genuine concern in the 1850s. The French Revolution promised emancipation of the lower orders, which had not yet been realized, but which lay there as a promise, a smoldering potentiality, intensified by the revolution of 1848, and as more and more of the population became able to read, as newspapers and other new media proliferated, as urban life gained greater allure, as industrial processes made what had previously been luxury goods more widely available, the concern that these people would start desiring all the things they could read about and seek to "sortir de leur condition," was a genuine social fear, as Senard's calculated remarks at the trial suggest.

And yet there is a connection between Flaubert's revolutionary notion that a trivial subject was as good as a noble subject for a serious novel, that the worth of a work of art does not depend on what is assumed to be the worth of its subject, and the democratic notion that every human subject is as worthy as another and allowed to have desires. He writes to Louise Colet in 1853 that if the book he is struggling with is successful, he will have demonstrated "that in literature there are no beautiful artistic subjects, and that Yvetot is as good one as Constantinople, and that consequently one

can write about any old thing, as well as about anything else” (“qu’il n’y a pas en littérature de beaux sujets d’art, et que Yvetot donc vaut Constantinople; et qu’en conséquence l’on peut écrire n’importe quoi aussi bien que quoi que ce soit”) (25 June 1853, *Correspondance* vol. 2 362). If there is a democracy of subjects, if a farm girl dissatisfied with her provincial life is as significant a subject as an aristocratic hero, that suggests a relation to democracy: equality of subjects, equality of desires, equality of votes.

Jacques Rancière argues that Flaubert’s reactionary contemporaries clearly perceived the relationship between this sort of democratic realism and the threat of political democracy. Asking “Why was this text, from an author of aristocratic sensibilities and cultivating art for art’s sake, immediately denounced as the literary incarnation of democracy?”, he notes that “The book about nothing was for them democracy in literature, the literary incarnation of the power of people of no account [‘gens de rien’]” (*Tant pis* 482, 321). When *Madame Bovary* was published, Armand de Pontmartin declared: “Gustave Flaubert means democracy in the novel” (“Gustave Flaubert, c’est la démocratie dans le roman”), and in a denunciation of this “egalitarianism run wild” he writes: “*Madame Bovary* equals the pathological overexcitement of the senses and the imagination in discontented democracy” (“*Madame Bovary*, c’est l’excitation malade des sens et de l’imagination dans la démocratie mécontente”).

There is a paradox here, since Flaubert is by no means a champion of the people or of democracy—he called universal suffrage “the most ignominious absurdity imaginable” (“la plus ignominieuse bêtise qu’on ait rêvée”) and famously declared “I’m certainly worth as much as twenty voters from Croisset,” his village (“Je vaudrais bien vingt électeurs de Croisset”) (to George Sand, 12 Oct. 1871, *Correspondance* vol. 4 194)⁵—yet he succeeded in depicting an Emma who, inspired by books, rebels against her condition, whose choices offer a critique of life as it currently set up. Concretely, as Rancière puts it, “Is there perhaps a link between Emma Bovary who tries to discover what is meant by words like happiness, ecstasy, intoxication that she has read in books, and those proletarians who also want to make real the words such as *liberty*, *equality*, and *emancipation of the workers*” (*Tant pis* 631).

At the very least, the beginnings of an industrial economy, which made many sorts of products more easily available to a larger public, accompanied an unleashing of new desires, which made people unhappy with the position and condition of life they were born into, creating a situation that

⁵ In fairness, these statements come after the Commune in 1871, long after *Madame Bovary*, but his preference always was for an enlightened aristocracy.

provoked various sorts of concerns, from the fear that people no longer knew their place and were gaining ideas above their station, to a complaint about vulgar and sentimental attempts to bring art into life. The critique of consumer society, of consumer capitalism, which becomes central to *Madame B*, begins in the 19th century as disgust at these new forms of experience that the lower classes came to desire. Flaubert himself, while clearly sympathizing with Emma's discontent, her desire for other kinds of experience, explicitly denounces, in a letter to Louise Colet, the growing desire of large portions of society to bring art into their lives, in a letter that condemns many trends in modern life:

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But mediocrity seeps in everywhere. . . . Let's denounce gloves of flocked silk, office armchairs, mackintoshes, efficient cooking devices, fake fabrics, fake luxury, fake pride. Industrialism swells the Ugly to grotesque proportions. How many decent people who, a century ago, could have lived perfectly well without the Beaux-Arts, now have to have little statuettes, mini-music, mini-literature! Just think what horrifying propagation of bad drawings lithography must produce!

(Mais la médiocrité s'infiltré partout. . . . gueulons donc contre les gants de bourre de soie, contre les fauteuils de bureau, contre le mackintosh, contre les caléfacteurs économiques, contre les fausses étoffes, contre le faux luxe, contre le faux orgueil! L'industrialisme a développé le Laid dans des proportions gigantesques! Combien de braves gens qui, il y a un siècle, eussent parfaitement vécu sans Beaux-Arts, et à qui il faut maintenant de petites statuettes, de petite musique et de petite littérature! Que l'on réfléchisse seulement quelle effroyable propagation de mauvais dessins ne doit pas faire la Lithographie!) (29 Jan. 1854, *Correspondance* vol. 2 518)

He may have deeply sympathized with Emma's unhappiness and boredom but had no patience with her attempts to decorate the house with what seemed to her luxury goods.

The point is that "literary democracy," in the sense of the equality of literary subjects, and political democracy only intersect at specific points, in the disruption of hierarchy, for example, and promotion of a principle of equality of subjects, but in that context Flaubert's novel works to delegitimize Emma as a subject by mocking her desires and choices (Rancière, *Tant pis* 321).⁶ The book is structured as a conflict of equalities. While

⁶ Cf. also Rancière, "La Mise à mort d'Emma Bovary."

promoting Emma as a valid subject of literature, equal to others, Flaubert writes against the attempt to democratize art, to make it enter every life and render trivial the manifestations of this subject's desires. It is important to stress that Emma's problem is not, as is often said, that she confuses literature and life; she knows all too well that her life is not like that which literature has represented, but she is not content to experience sentiments in and as literature only; she wants to give material form to the affective possibilities to which she has been exposed, to give material realization to her desires. Flaubert himself writes to la Princesse Matilde: "But art in itself is a good thing, when you lack everything else. For want of the real, one tries to console oneself by way of fiction" ("Mais l'Art, en soi, est une bonne chose, quand tout le reste vous manque. À défaut du réel, on tâche de se consoler par la fiction") (10 June 1868, *Correspondance* vol. 3 761). For him consolation comes from the experience of language, the production of literary affect, as in bravura descriptions in *Madame Bovary*. Practically-minded Emma, farm girl, who responds to literary language, to a certain mystique it creates, but wants practically enjoyable ideal pleasures, is not content with reading.

While readers have focused above all on Emma, an engaging character whose nature and situation is open to debate (is she a foolish woman or a tragic heroine, or neither, or both?), critics and other writers have been very taken by Flaubert's idea of *un livre sur rien*, where the evacuation of the subject would foreground novelistic art. Flaubert's novels are good to think with: they challenge our models of the novel, forcing us to reflect on the procedures and presuppositions that make possible our critical discourses—above all models for the production of meaning, based on conceptions of narrative posture and technique.

One of Flaubert's most striking challenge to assumptions about narrative technique, which helps sustain questions about Emma's nature and situation, is his obfuscation of the question "Qui parle?" Whose words, whose perspective are we encountering?⁷ There are several aspects to this. One comes in the celebrated opening of *Madame Bovary*. "Nous étions à l'Étude," the novel begins, with the "I" of the first-person narrator, recounting what he has witnessed: "We were in study hall when the headmaster came in, followed by a new boy, not wearing the school uniform . . ." ("Nous étions à l'Étude, quand le Proviseur entra, suivi d'un nouveau habillé en bourgeois . . .") (1, 1). But this narrative voice, which claims the authority of a fellow student, goes on, after the opening scene in the classroom, to provide a witty, synthesizing description of Charles's father

⁷ Cf. Culler chapter 2.

and Charles's previous life, which could not come from a classmate, and then notoriously announces, "It would be impossible for any of us today to recall anything about him. He was a boy of even temperament, who played at playtime, worked in school-hours, listened in class, slept well in the dormitory, and ate well in the refectory" ("Il serait maintenant impossible à aucun de nous de se rien rappeler de lui. C'était un garçon de tempérament modéré, qui jouait aux récréations, travaillait à l'étude, écoutait bien en classe, dormait au dortoir, et mangait bien au réfectoire") (1, 1). Who has been telling us all this then? The claim to authority is thus destroyed and the first person vanishes, the writing immediately continues to offer considerable authoritative-sounding detail: "He was a boy of even temperament, who played at playtime, worked in school-hours, listened in class. . . ." The introduction and then elimination of first person narration is a parody of narrative authority, of the traditional narrative technique of the knowledgeable observer, a flaunting of the artifice of narrative authority which marks the narrative voice as ghostly, fictional.

With the destruction of a first person narrative authority, one confronts the other major possibility, which narrative tradition calls by the misnomer "third person narration" (narration where no narrator says "I"). Flaubert's vaunted project of impersonality, which eschews first person narrative authority and seeks to make the author invisible, has frequently been misinterpreted, particularly in the wake of Henry James, as involving a limited point of view, where the narrative restricts itself to a particular angle of vision or limited knowledge, refusing to express opinions and depicting only the characters' point of view. But Flaubert plays mercilessly with such focalization, oscillating between a character's view and what is hard to attribute to the character.

In an article entitled "Over-writing as Un-writing," Mieke Bal identifies a nice case in the description of Charles's original fascination with Emma, where we seem to be getting what Charles notices:

Charles was surprised at the whiteness of her nails. They were shiny, delicately pointed, more polished than the ivories of Dieppe, and almond-shaped. Her hand was not beautiful, however, not pale enough, perhaps; it was too long as well, and a bit dry at the knuckles, without soft inflections in the shape of its contours.

(Charles fut surpris de la blancheur de ses ongles. Ils étaient brillants, fins du bout, plus nettoyés que les ivoires de Dieppe, et taillés en amande. Sa main, pourtant, n'était pas belle, pas assez pâle, peut-être; et un peu

sèche aux phalanges; elle était trop longue aussi et sans molles inflexions de lignes sur les contours.) (1, 2)

Whose focalization is put forward, Mieke Bal asks, in this *pourtant*, this *however*?

Are we supposed to think that this man, in love and endowed with mediocre intelligence and little subtlety, is detailing and weighing what is and is not pretty about Emma? In retrospect, then, would he be sophisticated enough to envisage the kind of ivory of the metaphoric network put in place around the nail? Suddenly it all falls apart. Not only is Emma epideictically detailed to death by incoherence; so is the discourse that describes her. (136)

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When *Madame Bovary* was indicted for outrage to public morals, for instance, centrally at issue in the trial was the author's responsibility for statements in the novel such as "the defilement of marriage and the disillusion of adultery" ("les souillures du mariage et la désillusion de l'adultère") (2, 15). One should write, the prosecutor argued, "les désillusions du mariage et la souillure de l'adultère" (Pinard). It is worth looking at the context of this statement for Flaubert's technique. Emma is at the opera with Charles, watching *Lucia di Lammermoor*:

Lucie came forward, half supported by her women, a wreath of orange blossoms in her hair and paler than the white satin of her gown. Emma was dreaming of her wedding day; she saw herself at home again amid the corn in the little path as they walked to the church. Oh, why had not she, like this woman, resisted, implored? She, on the contrary, had been joyful, oblivious of the abyss into which she was throwing herself. Ah! if only in the freshness of her beauty, before the defilement of marriage and the disillusion of adultery, she could have anchored her life upon some great, strong heart, then with virtue, tenderness, voluptuousness, and duty blending together, she would never have fallen from so high a happiness. But such happiness, no doubt, was a lie invented for the despair of all desire. She now knew the pettiness of the passions that art exaggerated. So, struggling to divert her thoughts, Emma resolved now to see in this reproduction of her sorrows no more than a plastic fantasy, good only to please the eye, and she was even smiling to herself in disdainful pity when at the back of the stage under the velvet hangings a man appeared in a black cloak.

(Lucie s'avancait, à demi soutenue par ses femmes, une couronne d'oranger dans les cheveux, et plus pâle que le satin blanc de sa robe. Emma rêvait au jour de son mariage; et elle se revoyait là-bas, au milieu des blés, sur le petit sentier, quand on marchait vers l'église. Pourquoi donc n'avait-elle pas, comme celle-là, résisté, supplié? Elle était joyeuse, au contraire, sans s'apercevoir de l'abîme où elle se précipitait . . . Ah! si, dans la fraîcheur de sa beauté, avant les souillures du mariage et la désillusion de l'adultère, elle avait pu placer sa vie sur quelque grand cœur solide, alors la vertu, la tendresse, les voluptés et le devoir se confondant, jamais elle ne serait descendue d'une félicité si haute. Mais ce bonheur-là, sans doute, était un mensonge imaginé pour le désespoir de tout désir. Elle connaissait à présent la petitesse des passions que l'art exagérait. S'efforçant donc d'en détourner sa pensée, Emma voulait ne plus voir dans cette reproduction de ses douleurs qu'une fantaisie plastique bonne à amuser les yeux, et même elle souriait intérieurement d'une pitié dédaigneuse, quand au fond du théâtre, sous la portière de velours, un homme apparut en manteau noir.) (2, 15)

In this marvellous passage there is modulation into and out of *style indirect libre*: into, with the question “pourquoi donc n'avait-elle pas comme celle-la . . .?”, and out of it, with “S'efforçant donc d'en détourner sa pensée.” So of course the phrase “les souillures du mariage,” coming as it does in a passage marked as *style indirect libre* by the elements that belong in direct rather than indirect discourse, such as “Ah, si,” may be regarded as Emma's thought rather than Flaubert's. But the phrase comes casually, in a dependent clause, almost as if it were a cliché; it is not given as the product of a thought process, in this passage where we are above all witnessing a process of thought, as Emma identifies with Lucia, recalls her wedding, imagines “un grand cœur solide” that would have saved her, and then turns skeptical of the artistic representation of passions, just as she is about to be swept off her feet by the appearance of the hero, in his black cloak. If the passage had said something like “au lieu du bonheur espéré, elle n'avait connu que les souillures du mariage et la désillusion de l'adultère,” we might be able to take the phrase as the expression of her thought, but placed as it is in a subordinate clause, we could certainly take it as the author's witty distillation of her experience—it is, after all, a clever chiasmus. On the other hand, it is certainly possible to imagine that Emma is now so disillusioned with adultery—she has lost the excitement of her “I have a lover! I have a lover!” (“J'ai un amant, j'ai un amant”) (2, 9)—and so accustomed to thinking of herself as sullied by marriage with Charles, that this formulation could in fact be taken as her automatic way of thinking of the relationships she has suffered.

But finally, I think, one can conclude that it doesn't really matter—unless perhaps, you are a prosecutor trying to catch an author in the act of immoral cynicism; the effect of the passage does not depend on our making any sort of decision about whose formulation this is. This novel is not an exploration of the precise shades of moral evaluation, degree of self-consciousness and ethical judgment of the character—not a novel like *The Golden Bowl* or *Portrait of a Lady*. Despite the obvious *style indirect libre*, we do not know who speaks. We can say, simply, it is written.

It is hard to reproduce such effects in a modern video transformation of the novel, and *Madame B* does not try, but of course in producing visual images it may create similar uncertainty about whether we are seeing what we are seeing because it shows what Emma is thinking or whether this is an authorial, directorial construction. And the highly original device of having viewers circulate among different screens at their own pace gives us a different type of uncertainty, even impersonality, that would doubtless have interested Flaubert, even though he expressed the ambition to undertake a work where it would only be a matter of writing sentences (to Louise Colet, 25 June 1853, *Correspondance* vol. 2 362).

I hope that those who have not explored *Madame B* will do so, and those who have not read the novel, or have not read it recently, will take it up, for it is certainly a work that repays rereading, as all the famous writers I cited at the beginning can amply testify, and you may well come to see *Madame Bovary* differently in the light of *Madame B*.

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Imagining Hedda Gabler: Munch and Ibsen on Art and Modern Life

ABSTRACT

Among Edvard Munch's many portraits of Henrik Ibsen, the famous Norwegian dramatist and Munch's senior by a generation, one stands out. Large in scope and with a characteristic pallet of roughly hewed gray blue, green and yellow, the sketch is given the title *Geniuses*. Munch's sketch shows Ibsen, who had died a few years earlier, in the company of Socrates and Nietzsche. The picture was a working sketch for a painting commissioned by the University. While Munch, in the end, chose a different motif for his commission, it is nonetheless significant that he found it appropriate to portrait the Norwegian dramatist in the company of key European philosophers, indeed the whole span of the European philosophical tradition from its early beginnings to its most controversial spokesman in the late 1800s. In my article, I seek to take seriously Munch's bold and original positioning of Ibsen in the company of philosophers. Focusing on *Hedda Gabler*—a play about love lost and lives unlived—I explore the aesthetic-philosophical ramifications of Ibsen's peculiar position between realism and modernism. This position, I suggest, is also reflected in Munch's sketches for the set design for Hermann Bahr's 1906 production of the play.

Keywords: Munch, Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*, aesthetics, nineteenth-century philosophy.

Norwegian by birth, international by reputation, Henrik Ibsen and Edvard Munch have come to incarnate the transition from modern life to the modernist sensibilities of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art in Scandinavia. Sometimes the transition is soft and almost unnoticeable, sometimes it is loud and dramatic, sometimes violent and painful. Through drama and paint Ibsen and Munch, respectively, have come to depict for us the tensions of modern times and existence. We find it in *Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen's 1890 play, written the very year before the author, after two decades of voluntary exile in Italy and Germany, returned to Oslo, or Kristiania, as the city was then called. Deeply fascinated by Ibsen, his senior by four decades, Munch would make a handful of Hedda sketches and a total of several hundred representations of Ibsen's work. How did Munch imagine Hedda Gabler, this most enigmatic of Ibsen's female heroines? How are we, more than a century later, to imagine her? These are the questions I will be focusing on in what follows—reflections that, in a few sections, may overlap with, but mostly spin off my introductory essay to *Ibsen's Hedda Gabler: Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford UP, 2017).

THE RHYTHM OF DESIRE

Strictly speaking, Hedda Gabler is not present in her own play. By all reasonable standards, Hedda is a character in a late nineteenth-century play by Henrik Ibsen, i.e. a work of fiction. But even in Ibsen's play, in the fictional universe to which she lends her name, there is no Hedda Gabler. The play is named after an existence that is over—ended, capsized, *finito*—when the curtains open and the play begins. There is, to be sure, the play's protagonist. But she is now Hedda Tesman, the unhappy, newly married wife of Jørgen, whose emotional register is so crisp-dry that for him life itself is concentrated in his forthcoming study of medieval Brabantian handicraft. As a character and a possibility, Hedda Gabler died with that wedding. She is reduced to a passive apparition sustained by Jørgen's aunt Julle, who will muse about Hedda Gabler as she used to ride with her father. Mounted on her horse, Hedda was a token of high-class elegance. She represented a life beyond reach for Julle, but yet an object ever so desirable for her limited, petite-bourgeois imagination. She is also animated through the longings of another male character, he too a historian, Ejler Løvborg. Unlike Julle, however, who naively invests in the presence of Hedda Gabler, Løvborg knows that Hedda's existence as a Gabler is in fact a presence past.

Hedda's father, the General, is another character missing in the play. He passed before the beginning of the play's time. Yet he is the first character we encounter on stage. We see him, in the form of his painted portrait, centrally

hung above the sofa as the curtains open. (It is not irrelevant in this context that Ibsen, for periods of his life, was himself an avid painter.) Like Hedda Gabler, the General is no longer there, but unlike her, the person to which his name refers is now dead. Hedda Gabler's presence, her unlived life, unrealized dreams and unfulfilled hopes, hover, albeit in a different way, in her life as Hedda Tesman. For Julle, Hedda may well be a trophy of social aspirations, but for the admiring Ejlert Løvborg, she represents something very different.

As a scholar, Ejlert is Jørgen's opposite. There is no investment in Brabantian handicraft from his side. Along the lines of Burckhardt or Nietzsche, Ejlert displays an unabashed fascination with the great civilizations, world history and, beyond that, the impossible task of writing, as a historian, a three-part treatise on the past, the present and, taking him well beyond his *métier* as a historian, the future. For Ejlert, Hedda Gabler is an object of absolute desire, possibly the only woman he has loved and is still deeply infatuated with.

Unlike her new and unlived identity as Mrs. Tesman, Hedda's past as a Gabler is given materiality, rhythm, and presence as it resounds in Ejlert Løvborg's "Hedda—Gabler" (HG 215; HIS 103).¹ *Sagte og langsomt*, quiet and unhurried, read Ibsen's insistent instructions. There is so much longing, so much passion contained in the punctuation, voice and pace—comparable, perhaps, only to the opening lines (equally fiery, equally controlled) of Nabokov's *Lolita*. In Nabokov we get the rhapsodic "Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. 'Ta" (9).² Ibsen, by comparison, has us, somewhat less playfully, emphasize the E in Hedda (as her name is pronounced in Norwegian) and dwell by the A in Gabler, so that, in saying her maiden name, we cannot help giving it a waft of desire and openness. Both Ibsen and Nabokov play on the rhythm of a name, of desire as rhythm, and the rhythm of desire. The parallel to Nabokov is not simply a matter of giving form and shape to an unbound longing. For whether we like it or not, Ejlert Løvborg has a bit of a Humbert Humbert in him. A friend of General Gabler, he makes advances on the young Hedda as the two are perched on the sofa in her father's study.

¹ Further references to *Hedda Gabler* will be marked respectively as HG (*Four Major Plays: A Doll's House, Ghosts, Hedda Gabler, The Master Builder*. Ed. James McFarlane. Trans. James McFarlane and Jens Arup. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) and HIS (*Henrik Ibsens Skrifter*. Ed. Vigdis Ystad et al. Trans. Modified. Vol. IX. Oslo: Aschehoug, 2005–2010), followed by volume and page number.

² For Løvborg's play on Hedda's name, see HG 215, HIS IX 103. In the Arup translation, Ibsen's hyphen is, unfortunately, replaced by dots. The rhythmic play on the maiden name, to which Tesman would remain tone deaf, continues over the following pages.

Hedda, in other words, is wanted for very different reasons by Jørgen, Julle and Ejlert. A fourth admirer, the cynical Judge Brack, can also be added to the mix. Does Hedda have her own identity? Does she emerge as a woman with her own wants, her own desires? Does she at all have an identity? And, if not, to what extent can she be known? It is hard to know, really—hard to know Hedda and hard to know an other überhaupt. But what we do know is that it is not easy to be an object of desire, to be somebody whose life is but a slate of social aspirations (for the Tesmans), a utopian blend of existential meaning and carnal satisfaction (Løvborg), and an uncouth demand for sexual favors (Brack). Thus the initial question reemerges: How can we picture this figure, this tabula rasa of investments, this woman who remains unknown—to others and to herself?

STAGE LIFE

A few months after *Hedda Gabler* had premiered at the Residenztheater in Munich, Ibsen walks home with a friend after a party. “Can you write plays about people you have never known?”, he reportedly asks his friend this spring evening in March 1891 (Ferguson 347, 361). Could he, as her author, have known Hedda? Hedda is perhaps the most complicated of all his protagonists. She is warm and cold, terribly fussy and, at times, embarrassingly simple in her responses to other people and to the challenges of life. Hedda is kind and mean. She is crazily ambitious and utterly passive. She is clearly desired and yet, from an audience point of view, it is oftentimes hard to see exactly what her attraction consists of. Could Hedda have been known? Is she at all knowable?

Known or unknown to herself and her author, Hedda Gabler, the lovely Hedda Gabler (“dejlige Hedda Gabler,” as the original has it), remains a mystery to readers, audiences and stage directors (HG 171; HIS IX 19). Ingmar Bergman, in his 1979 Munich production (he staged several versions of the play), captures her in an unbearably painful act of humiliation: when Hedda can no longer take it, when she shoots herself in the final act, not only does Judge Brack get his famously un-empathic and emotionally stunted closing line: “But, good God Almighty . . . people don’t do such things” (HG 264; HIS IX 203).³ Moreover, Bergman deviates from Ibsen’s instructions and has Hedda fall with her back vulnerably exposed to the audience and the Judge lift her head by her hair so as to reassure himself that

³ Again, Ibsen’s important modulation, this time in the form of an emphasis, is lost in translation: “Men, Gud forbarme,—sligt noget gør man da ikke!”

she really is dead, deader than dead, we might add.⁴ For with Hedda's suicide, what died—and this is even more harrowing than her actual death—is the hope of a life beyond the values of cold conventions and narrow social aspirations. Like Flaubert's Emma Bovary, Hedda is a dreamer. But unlike Emma, Hedda's existence is stripped of romantic reverie. Emma is bored and dreams of a life glorious, sweet and with a touch of glamor. Hedda, too, is bored. But she does not appear to believe in a life beyond boredom. If she dreams, she dreams of beauty. But beauty, for her, is simply a form of sense-making: an existence where the different pieces of her life would fit together, where there is room for action, self-expression and self-realization. This may well be why her final humiliation is so utterly crushing. As dreamers, as utopians of the everyday, we, the audience, are also being humiliated—our dreams, too, are being crushed, and yet we know that without such dreams, without such hopes and aspirations, human life is so gray, so lifeless, that it borders on the unliveable. Can Hedda, as she fights against this grayness, be imagined? On Theodor W. Adorno's reading, the poor Aunt Julle, evil incarnated, is both damned and damning because her very mission is to have us accept this grayness and stop imagining a life, a Hedda, beyond this dreamless existence, this world of nothing but the petty concerns of an anonymous *das Man*, to borrow a phrase from Martin Heidegger, Adorno's philosophical arch-enemy in the phenomenology camp (cf. Adorno 93–94).

PAINTING HEDDA

A painter of modern life, Edvard Munch was fascinated by Ibsen—by the man and by his work. He drew sketch after sketch of Ibsen's plays and characters. Some of them were commissions, most famously for the Max Reinhardt production of *Ghosts* at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin.⁵ There is, as mentioned, also a series of Heddas in Munch's collection. Munch's Hedda was, initially, painted at the invitation of Hermann Bahr, Reinhardt's companion in Berlin, but she ended up taking on a life of her own.

Hedda—the unknown and unknowable Hedda; Hedda as she is seen through the eyes of Julle, Jørgen and Brack.⁶ Hedda Gabler, as her name is given rhythm and presence through Ejlert's lack of self-containment; his needing, simply, to say her name as he once knew it, just as he needed, back

⁴ For a discussion of Bergman's production, see Frederick J. Marker and Lise-Lone Marker (191).

⁵ See Erika Fischer-Lichte (61–83).

⁶ In this respect, it seems Ibsen outdoes even Witold Gombrowicz, himself a master of indirect observation.

then, to overstep the boundaries of trust and make a pass on his friend's—the General—daughter. How did Munch imagine Hedda? How did he imagine Hedda—Gabler? Can the lingering of a hyphen, the dwelling on the vowels—the heavy, almost material quality of Løvborg's longings, the futile hope that time can be reversed, that Hedda Gabler's existence can, yet again, be resuscitated, given life, be brought back to the point at which her dreams and hopes still have a chance to leave a mark on reality—can all this find expression in paint form?

Among Munch's Hedda sketches, a simple watercolour image from the year immediately following Ibsen's death stands out.⁷ It is as powerful as can be. Munch captures Hedda in a state of frozenness and absolute isolation. He captures her, as it were, independent of the desiring gazes, of the investments of the aunt, the husband and the would-be lovers. In fact, there is not even furniture in the sketch, even though the placing and replacing of furniture figures significantly in Ibsen's portrayal of Hedda's caged existence. Perhaps for practical-theatrical reasons, perhaps as a result of artistic concerns, Munch presents his Hedda almost as an abstraction, though in other sketches she emerges in clothing that discretely matches the palette of the living room, as if she, too, were now but a piece of furniture in the Tesman's collection.⁸ In this simple watercolour rendering, Hedda stands forth with the uncompromising, existential either/or that structures her thoughts. This, Munch has us imagine, is Hedda as she really *is*, not as she is seen by the other characters, though we know far too well that here, too, she is seen—and that we, for that matter, are also seen, even if we happen to be more like actors without a stage. Hedda is alone, terrifyingly exposed in a poise of absolute composure. Her dress is sharp, of an armor-like quality, but her posture, arms by her side, reveals another side of her. The lifeless, almost rigid arms—in Munch's imagery we find this pose in, among other places, his pictures of women in the nude. Though naked, the women in question somehow appear less exposed than Hedda is. Or, to put it differently, in her blue-gray dress, standing there so cut off from all things human, Hedda seems even more drastically bared, even more drastically undressed than the nudes. In this way, Munch imagined Hedda for us, and his images, as it was intended for the Bahr production, was supposed to gain a life beyond watercolour, a life as embodied on stage.

⁷ Fig. 1. *Hedda Gabler*, 1906–07, watercolour and pencil, 660 x 487 mm. Munch Museum, Oslo. MM.T.1584.

⁸ Fig. 2. *Hedda Gabler* (sketch for scenography), 1906–07, gouache and watercolour, 340 x 500 mm. Munch Museum, Oslo. MM.T.1583.

CRAVING BEAUTY

Independently of its theatrical context, a striking aspect of Munch's Hedda portrait is its balancing the peculiar blend of realism and modernism that characterizes Ibsen's work, at least after he, with *Emperor and Galilean*, leaves behind the historical drama that made up the bulk of his production up until the 1870s. Munch presents Hedda—not as Hedda Gabler, not as Hedda Tesman, but as being anxiously pulled between these fraught identities—in a way that has her point back, perhaps, to the ever misplaced Madame Bovary, but also forward, albeit in a very different voice and a prose less disciplined, to James Joyce, whose youthful self was immersed in Ibsen and his language, and who, in 1901, wrote the old master a moving letter of respect and appreciation, sentiments that were later funneled into the rambling Norwegian references in *Finnegans Wake* (including the appearance of a master builder, or, as we read, *Bygmester*, Finnegan).⁹

If we no longer—as Adorno and Lukács had assumed in their famous Grand Hotel Abyss debate in the aftermath of the Second World War—have to choose between realism and modernism, then Ibsen's mature drama, marking the fluid boundaries between the two, gains a new relevance. Exploring the receptive space disclosed once we leave behind the idea of watertight literary periods and paradigms, we realize that while, in *Hedda Gabler*, the protagonist practically *is* the play, we are still talking about a work that synthesizes a mid-nineteenth-century concern with the individual heroine, the new woman and her role in a new bourgeois society, and a modernist awareness of the impossibility of true beauty in a world dominated by pragmatist morale and the ever-compromising middle grounds of the bourgeois. Like Munch and the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, Ibsen anticipates the currents of late twentieth-century art and thought. While *Hedda Gabler* is certainly not the only name play in Ibsen's *oeuvre*—we have *Catiline*, *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *Bygmester Solness* (as *The Master Builder* is called in the original), *John Gabriel Borkman*—*Hedda Gabler* is the only play that is named after a protagonist who no longer carries her name, thus displaying, in its very title, an eerie absence.

Many of Ibsen's characters are haunted by a desire for a beautiful life. And yet beauty will not be theirs. Beauty is something they think about, hope for, crave. In *A Doll's House*, having had its premiere 11 years prior to *Hedda Gabler*, we encounter at least two different versions of this: Torvald's (the husband's) narrow-minded dream of a beautiful, basically comfortable, existence, and Nora's less tamed desire for “the wonderful [det vidunderlige],” associated with true love and true acknowledgement. In *Hedda Gabler* we find

⁹ For a study of Joyce and Ibsen, see Bjørn J. Tysdahl.

a very different version of this desire. At one and the same time, Hedda is asking for very little and for far too much. Just as we know, from *Ghosts*, that Oswald Alving's hopes for a light and happy existence are bound to fail, so Hedda's desire for a beautiful (that is, meaningful) existence cannot but end in tragedy. Her tragedy, though, does not, like Nora's, have to do with her relationship to others. Nor is it, again like Nora, a matter of sticking to one's ethical-educational-existential ideals. Hedda's tragic conflict is not with other characters or ideals, but with her world and with herself: she fails to find meaning in the world as she knows it, yet also fails (due to gender? class? cultural situation?) to change her world so as to make it more inhabitable.

We do not, in Ibsen's universe, have many happy endings. Perhaps it is only in *The Lady from the Sea*, published two years before *Hedda Gabler*, that we get a promise of happiness. Elida Wangel's husband offers her the freedom to choose another man and another life, but she decides to stay, thus taking over and making both her marriage and her life her own. Also in *Little Eyolf*, where the main characters respond to the loss of a child with a genuine wish to do good for other children, is there a ray of hope. Yet the hope is relatively meager, as we know the parents' track-record is not exactly one of well-finished projects and responsible conduct. Their son, the drowned Eyolf, was maimed after he fell off a table where he was left while his parents spent time on their own.

Is there, then, no *promesse de bonheur* in Ibsen's drama? This was definitely the objection raised by his early critics: like his naturalist companions, Ibsen presents us with a universe so bleak, so deprived of a future, that the very institution of the theatre was said to be in peril. It is telling that of the forty works translated by the Danish stage director Johan Ludvig Heiberg, whom Ibsen met during a formative trip to Copenhagen in 1851, twenty-one were plays by Scribe.¹⁰ This was the era of the vaudeville, and of comedy and arts of the uplifting kinds. Breaking with this aesthetic (at times also aestheticizing) paradigm, Ibsen, it was feared, had opened the gates to a dour, unpleasant and earnest kind of theatre. If this was a new and truth-searching drama, then the critics could not help asking whose truth was on display and in whose name and under what banner it was issued in the first place.

Edmund Gosse, Ibsen's translator in England, wrote one of the first English language reviews of *Hedda Gabler*. While the pious Thea Elvsted, whose joy in life is to be Ejlert and later Jørgen's companion in work, was praised for her character, Hedda was viewed as a monstrous version of the modern woman. Lacking in morale and respect for others, she was taken to display an egoism bordering on the insane; she was guilty of "indifferentism

¹⁰ See Elisabete M. de Sousa (169–85, 172ff).

and morbid selfishness, all claws and thirst for blood under the delicate velvet of her beauty,” as Gosse put it. Gosse’s review is somewhat symptomatic of the larger reception. For, as the work premiered, reviewers got caught up in discussions of Hedda’s morality, or lack of it, rather than seeing her as a tragic figure, and her tragedy as associated with her sense of inhabiting a world in which values no longer had a place, where they withered and died, since a basic horizon of meaning, against which ideals could be identified, could no longer be found.¹¹ They did not, in short, see her as we can see her through the lens of Edvard Munch’s work: as a realist-modernist heroine captured in the existential cul-de-sac of a life that appears unliveable.

ART BEYOND BEAUTY

The reviewers’ orientation towards Ibsen’s pessimism is, doubtlessly, symptomatic of a certain vision of what art is and should be. Art should sustain, motivate and offer hope and ideals to live by.¹² However, as so many of Ibsen’s characters come to realize, a world of beautiful ideals can no longer be taken for granted—it is no longer ours. Further, the beauty Hedda and her likes are longing for is not a beauty beyond this world, not the beauty of transcendent ideals, but a beauty that colours the everyday fabric of intersubjective interaction, making the world a bit less mundane and, all the same, a bit more human.

Ibsen’s female characters do not long for the impossible. They long for a world that they can call theirs—a world where there is a future to speak of, where temporality extends beyond the past and the isolated moments of the present. Like Madame Bovary, the Noras Helmer, Helenes Alving or Hedda Gabler of this world are not irresponsible, utopian thinkers, but characters that stand forth, precisely, by virtue of their *care* for existence—they do, in a certain sense, take their world and their lives *seriously*. If this, as the reviewers initially pointed out, is nihilism, then it is of a kind that escapes the lethargy of Nietzsche’s passive nihilist, but also the fanfare of his world-creating counterpart.¹³

¹¹ Helpful material on this and other aspects of the work can be found in Christopher Innes’s *Henrik Ibsen’s “Hedda Gabler”: A Sourcebook*.

¹² As Ibsen puts it in a speech from 1887, he is a pessimist because he “does not believe in the eternal life of human ideals.” He adds, though, that this gives room for optimism—optimism about “fertility of [human] ideals and their ability to develop” (he believes in “idealernes forplantningsevne og . . . deres udviklingsdygtighed”) (“Tale Ved Fest I Stockholm 24 September 1887,” my translation).

¹³ Georg Brandes distinguishes between two different kinds of pessimism. Ibsen’s pessimism, he claims, is not of the sentimental and longing kind, but more related to moral indignation: he does not complain, he accuses, in Brandes’s Zola-inspired phrase (1).

Yet Ibsen's readers and audiences cannot but note that, in a wider sense, so many of Ibsen's characters are more than roles to be acted. His characters are also the playwrights or the dramaturgs of their own lives. Hedda is no exception. With her vision of a life that is not and cannot be hers, Hedda is stuck with her mundane concerns (the flowers, the hats, the curtains, her petty likes and dislikes) and, in her own words, with that very special talent for boredom. This is, though, not a situated boredom, as we experience it when waiting for the subway to arrive or are stuck at a party we did not want to attend in the first place. Hedda's boredom is of a kind that is unrelated to a concrete context; hers is a deeper and more profound kind of existential ennui. She needs beauty, her own definition of beauty, not the beauty of the other-worldly, idealist sort. And she needs the promise of a life that offers ideals that are not compromised, that, emphatically, *cannot* be compromised in terms of pragmatic-domestic concerns such as a well-furnished home, a well-groomed family, or a husband's more or less well-managed academic career. Having married into the Tesman clan, Hedda knows that beauty will not be hers. Hedda, though, has her own artistic skills. In her life, she fails to produce the beauty she longs for (though *her* suicide, unlike Ejlert's is indeed performed according to her criteria of beauty).¹⁴ Yet she produces a kind of play, a theatrical piece, within her circles.

By all conventional standards, Hedda's play is far from beautiful. She stages social relationships, turning friends and family into accomplices and audiences to her seemingly rather mean-spirited communication games. She shifts furniture around as if her home were indeed a stage. Hedda is a woman with her own theatre, yet this theatre fails to satisfy her; it does not and cannot live up to the beauty for which she longs.

Ibsen's female characters bear witness to an existence, a form of life, in which action no longer makes sense, no longer makes a difference, yet is so badly and thoroughly needed. Boxed into the small and well-defined universe of the *Kammerspiel*, there is a very distinct sense that one cannot go on, yet must (and, yes, there is, in this sense, a proto-Beckettian topos here). The moment the Ibsenesque heroine buckles is when the weight of this "must" gets too heavy. And just like the tragic female heroines brought forth by Flaubert or Zola, so the Noras, the Helenes, the Heddas of Ibsen's drama explore, in different ways, the costs of this impossible imperative. It matters, to be sure, that they are female characters. Yet the experiences they convey are deeply and profoundly human.

¹⁴ While the suicide is, in Ibsen's stage descriptions, performed offstage, we still learn, in the original, that she shoots herself in the head, although this part of the play is often altered in its more modern adaptations.

STAGING MODERNITY

What kind of world, then, is staged in Ibsen's drama? What kind of world is a character such as Hedda Gabler responding to and finding so colourless and dull? Where do we find the cold hearts of the Tesmans and the Judge, who observes Hedda almost as one would observe a helpless animal restlessly pacing its cage in a zoo? Is it the world of nineteenth-century Norway? Of nineteenth-century Europe? Or of a global cultural condition? And, further, is this a world that is still ours, as we watch the play being performed, over and over again, on stage?

In the scholarship, Ibsen, more often than not, is situated as part of nineteenth-century Norwegian culture, with its growing middle class, its emerging cultural identity, and its, for the time, fairly progressive discussion of gender. This, surely, is part of Ibsen's cultural backdrop and it may well be *one* way of shedding light on how, as a playwright, he allows such powerful female characters to take the stage—and thus creates an opening, in effect, for talented female actresses to realize themselves professionally, but also for a division amongst reviewers, with a general tendency towards a more positive response, in his time, from female audiences, especially with respect to a theatrical figure such as Hedda.

As a painter of modern life, as a painter inhabiting the very point at which modernity slides into full-scale modernism, Munch sketched Hedda and he sketched her spot on. He also made sketches for other Ibsen plays, including the woodcuts referring to *The Pretenders* and the program for *Peer Gynt*. The latter was a commission for Alfred Jarry and his avant-garde theatre in Paris. Munch, though, did not only draw Ibsen's characters. He also painted Ibsen himself. And among Munch's portraits of Ibsen, one stands out. Large in format and with Munch's characteristic pallet of roughly hewed gray-blue, green and yellow, the oil sketch is given the title *The Geniuses* (1909).¹⁵ Long after the publication and premiere of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, but only a few years after Munch's *Hedda Gabler*, Munch's sketch shows Ibsen, who had died three years earlier, in the company of Socrates and Nietzsche. Barely recognizable save for the eyebrows and sideburns, both of some nineteenth-century magnitude, Ibsen is situated slightly off centre, but is still the dominant figure. Nietzsche takes the centre space, but is somewhat smaller in shape and granted less massive a presence. Then there is Socrates, old, frail and pushed even further back. It seems that Socrates—and, with him, the ideals of the ancient Greeks—is

¹⁵ Fig. 3. *The Geniuses. Ibsen, Nietzsche and Socrates*, 1909, oil painting, 134.5 x 175 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo. MM.M.917.

about to wither, and Nietzsche and Ibsen, the heroes of artistic realism and philosophical naturalism, are prepared to take over.

The work was a sketch for Munch's commission for the great aula at the University of Oslo. Munch had imagined "large panels of Nietzsche, Ibsen, Socrates, against a background . . . where one can glimpse Egypt, with the pyramids and the Sphinx, the Alps and large cities" (qtd. in Templeton 37). In a spirit of *Lebensphilosophie*, it was to be accompanied by a panel showing how humanity "pushes itself up towards the light, a confused mass of humanity, one on top of another, straining towards the sun" (qtd. in Templeton 37). This, it is safe to assume, is a vision that marks the end of a romantic-idealistic era, whatever it might have been. If Munch himself was no painterly realist, he definitely appreciated the spirit of Ibsen's work, as it spanned the early historical plays, his realist and naturalist periods, and the later symbolic drama. As it is, Munch would himself be paying homage to Ibsen through a total of more than 400 paintings, prints and drawings.¹⁶

In the end, Munch abandoned his Socrates, Ibsen and Nietzsche motif—at least as far as direct portraiture is concerned. Instead, we get the famous sun, Oswald's sun, as Munch called it, with a reference to the dying protagonist, himself a painter, of Ibsen's *Ghosts*.¹⁷

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the context of Henrik Ibsen, Edvard Munch and *Hedda Gabler*, Munch's sketch is important for a number of reasons. Given the centrality of the painting—the festive grand hall of the University—it indicates how, in his view, painting, theatre and philosophy are all entirely crucial to the education of future generations. Munch's motif, for the sketch and the finished work, is even a bit tongue in cheek. For in this period, representatives of the university, as it was approaching its first centenary, were virulently opposed to the placing of a new National Theatre in its vicinity. A new National Theatre, they feared, would break the clean geographical axis from the Royal Palace to the University and further on to the National Assembly into an architectonic triangle that, along with governance and education, would include the dramatic arts.

Be that as it may, what matters for our context is that Munch, in the period around Ibsen's death, finds it appropriate to place Ibsen in the com-

¹⁶ Munch's work with the theatre is covered in Carla Lathe (191–206).

¹⁷ References to the sun, though, figure prominently in Ibsen's work. Perhaps nowhere so centrally as in *Emperor and Galilean*, where the dying Julian, in a pagan twist on Christ on the cross, utters "O, sol, sol—hvis bedrog du mig?" (HIS VI 742).

pany of central European philosophers, indeed the whole span of the European philosophical tradition from its early beginnings to its most controversial spokesman in the late 1800s. This philosophical landscape, Munch must have thought, is a suitable context for Ibsen, the dramatist. The assumption is equally fitting if we reverse it and also assume that Ibsen, on Munch's reading, suitably brings to stage the dominant trends in nineteenth-century European thought—that he, emphatically, *stages* the Nineteenth Century.¹⁸

Almost a century and a half after its initial publication, *Hedda Gabler*, the play and the character, has taken on a separate life, with or without the influence of her erstwhile creator. She has become part of our collective psyche, part of the theatre world and part of our understanding of what Sigmund Freud, another reader of Ibsen (and chronicler of female qualms and hesitation), would designate, in terms not quite captured in the English “discontent,” as *das Unbehagen in der Kultur*.¹⁹ From this point of view, there is a legitimate place for a Hedda in the transition from plain modernity to its hyper-reflected modernist articulations. And, as she is handed down to us by Munch, Hedda, in her blue-gray dress, stands there as an incarnation of the modernist imperative above them all: in the face of life un-lived, love turned cold, the only warmth that art can offer is that of giving voice to a pain that remains and will remain burning.

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¹⁸ Needless to say, this does not imply that the philosophical tenors make up the *only* or a privileged background to Ibsen’s work, simply that it is an important aspect of it and, further, aspect that, from a systematic point of view, is somewhat under-illuminated in the scholarship.

¹⁹ For an overview of Ibsen and psychoanalysis, see, for example, Liz Møller (112–28).

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Fig. 1. Edvard Munch, *Hedda Gabler*, 1906–07, watercolour and pencil, 660 x 487 mm. Munch Museum, Oslo. MM.T.1584.



Fig. 2. Edvard Munch, *Hedda Gabler* (sketch for scenography), 1906–07, gouache and watercolour, 340 x 500 mm. Munch Museum, Oslo. MM.T.1583.



Fig. 3. Edvard Munch, *The Geniuses. Ibsen, Nietzsche and Socrates*, 1909, oil painting, 134.5 x 175 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo. MM.M.917.

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**Attention for Distraction: Modernity,
Modernism and Perception**

ABSTRACT

Particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century sensorial experiences changed at breakneck speed. Social and technological developments of modernity like the industrial revolution, rapid urban expansion, the advance of capitalism and the invention of new technologies transformed the field of the senses. Instead of attentiveness, distraction became prevalent. It is not only Baudelaire who addressed these transformations in his poems, but they can also be recognized in the works of novelist Gustave Flaubert and painter Edward Munch. By means of the work of William James, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Georg Simmel, the repercussions of this crisis of the senses for subjectivity will be discussed.

Keywords: distraction, attention, modernity, modernism, abstraction.

In *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (1990) and in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (1999), American art historian Jonathan Crary discusses crucial changes in the nature of perception that can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Focusing on the period from about 1880 to 1905 he examines the connections between the expansion of metropolitan cities such as Paris and Berlin, the dramatic expansion and industrialization of visual and auditory culture, and the transformation and modernization of subjectivity. Crary approaches these issues through analyses of works by three key modernist painters: Manet, Seurat and Cézanne, who each engaged with the disruptions, vacancies and rifts within the perceptual field. At the core of his project is the paradoxical nature of attention. Each artist in his own way discovered that sustained attentiveness, rather than fixing or securing the world, leads to perceptual disintegration and loss of presence, and each used this discovery as the basis for a reinvention of representational practices.

Crary does not discuss the work of Edward Munch, although Munch is also a modernist painter whose representational practice could be understood as engaging with the disruptions and vacancies within the perceptual field, and as reflecting or embodying in his works a new, modern notion of subjectivity. In this article, I will not do what Crary has omitted to do, and substantiate his argument on modernity in an analysis of Munch's works. What I will do in what follows is elaborate on the kind of modern subjectivity that came about in response to the transformations of the perceptual field that were caused by modernity. In consequence of that analysis I will make a suggestion for how this account of the modern subject in relation to the perceptual field opens up a different understanding of Munch's style of painting.

In his *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan*, American literary scholar Ulrich Baer defines the essence of modernity as the experience of shock, of experiences that register as unresolved, of traumatic experiences that elude memory and cognition (1). Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan are for him major figures who mark the beginning and ending of modernity. Baudelaire first recognized the dissolution of experience that characterizes modern existence. Although his confrontation with the "small shocks of urban existence" pale in comparison to Celan's efforts to testify to the Holocaust, both Baudelaire and Celan inscribe the historical events they were part of as "shocking and traumatic because they occurred in complete isolation and as absolute breaks with the belief systems that grounded their worlds" (8).

This diagnosis of modernity sounds perhaps far-fetched, but it becomes more convincing when found reflected in the observations of a writer who is associated neither with the revolutionary changes in Parisian urban life nor with the catastrophe of the Holocaust, namely John Ruskin. In 1856, a year before Baudelaire published *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Ruskin understood the paintings of Victor Turner in relation to the modern man's decreasing graspability of the world as caused by the increasing industrialization and consumption of coal:

Out of perfect light and motionless air, we find ourselves on a sudden brought under sombre skies . . . and we find that whereas all the pleasure of [earlier days] was in stability, definiteness, and luminousness, we are expected to rejoice in darkness, and triumph in mutability; to lay the foundation of happiness in things which momentarily change or fade, and to expect the utmost satisfaction and instruction from what it is impossible to arrest, and difficult to comprehend. (Ruskin 317)

It is in modernity, however, that this vanishing of the “experienceability” of the world has repercussions for the experiencing subject. This becomes very clear, for instance, in Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*) of 1910. In the years covered by the notebooks, the narrator attempts to gain some control over the sensory impressions that initially threaten to overwhelm him. He experiences this invasion of sensory stimuli most strongly in the city. In Paris he is literally bombarded by acoustic stimuli:

Electric trams go clanging through my room. Cars run over me. A door slams. Somewhere a windowpane crashes down and I hear the larger shards laugh and the smaller splinters giggle. Then suddenly, a dull muffled sound from the other side, inside the house. Someone is climbing the stairs. Comes, keeps on coming. Arrives, stays there a long time, then goes on up. And then the street again. A girl screams: Ah tais toi, je ne veux plus. The tram races in, rattling with excitement, and then rattles on, over everything. Someone shouts, People walk hard, catch each other up. A dog barks. (Rilke 8)

Rilke personifies Malte's acoustic experiences—shards that laugh and splinters that giggle—transforming the sounds into active agents threatening to overwhelm the protagonist. It is as though the car is riding over him and the excess of acoustic stimuli makes it impossible for him to take

any distance or reflect on anything. He literally registers everything and, deprived of the capacity for reflection, loses any secure sense of himself.

The main character in this novel threatens to go under, due to the sensory impressions that assault him in the modern city. Stimuli penetrate his body by way of his senses, and threaten his self with disintegration. The border between him and his external reality disappears. The subject (or disintegration of it) presented here is no longer defined by reason, but by his senses. In Rilke's novel this situation is experienced as negative. The thrust of the novel, then, consists of the search for remedies against this feeling of being completely overwhelmed by sensory impressions.

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Rilke's narrator can be seen as exemplary for a new view of subjectivity and bodily experience that became increasingly important during the course of the nineteenth century. According to this view, rationalism and cognition is no longer the foundation of subjectivity and the senses are no longer the instruments by which the rational subject can dominate its environment; on the contrary, subjecthood is formed in reaction to stimuli that penetrate the body by way of the senses. The "battle" that is thus waged through the senses is of a fundamentally different nature than it was before. While remaining the point of contact between the subject and its surroundings, the senses no longer function as an interface separating the subject from the outside world, thus enabling him to survey and control it. Instead, the senses are now conceived of as a channel or door that is continually ajar, through which the outside world penetrates the body in the form of stimuli. The balance in the power struggle between the subject and the outside world would now seem to tip decisively towards the latter.

Some theorists associate this nineteenth and early twentieth century concern for the role of sensory impressions in the creation of subjectivity with the social and technological developments of modernity. As a result of the industrial revolution, rapid urban expansion, the advance of capitalism and the invention of new technologies, the field of the senses changed—particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century—at breakneck speed. The subject was increasingly exposed to new sensations that could no longer be fitted into the familiar world order. Therefore, in the words of Jonathan Crary, an essential aspect of modernity consists of:

a continual crisis of attentiveness. . . . the changing configurations of capitalism pushing attention and distraction to new limits and thresholds, with an unending introduction of new products, new sources of stimulation, and streams of information. (Crary, "Unbinding Vision" 22)

According to Crary, this “crisis of the senses” is the reason why the concept of “attention” became one of the most important categories in the empirical psychology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The American philosopher and psychologist William James (brother of modernist novelist Henry James), for instance, defined the subject in terms of attention, concentration or focalization. Precisely at the point when the *distraction* of the subject starts to emerge as a new phenomenon in the course of the nineteenth century, he took the concentration and attention of the subject to be decisive for human subjectivity.

But not everyone sees distraction as a polar opposite of attention or concentration, hence, as threatening to the subject. German thinkers such as Sigfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin consider it rather as a liberation or emancipation of the subject than as its downfall. In his essay “The Cult of Distraction” from 1924, Kracauer tells us how the new media of his time such as radio and film bring about an intense form of distraction in the viewer or listener. Someone listening to the radio, for instance, will switch from one station to another. The idea of the uninterrupted unity of the traditional work of art is radically disrupted by the “fragmented sequence of splendid sense impressions” that comprises the reception of film. On the one hand, these ways of looking and listening are symptomatic of the fragmented character of modern life, “deprived of substance, empty as a tin can, a life which instead of internal connections knows nothing but isolated events forming ever new series of images in the manner of a kaleidoscope.” On the other hand, Kracauer argued that watching films would help to demolish the bourgeois worldview, “making the ‘soul’ flow out of itself to become a part of the material world . . . constantly encountering material reality” (qtd. in Armstrong 216).

In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” Walter Benjamin presents that over the course of modernity, distraction of the viewer-listener becomes less and less the opposite of attention. Rather, being distracted is a special form of attention through which entirely different objects penetrate the subject. He compares the effect of cinema with Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis, which made it possible to isolate matters that hitherto “floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception” (235), subjecting them to analysis. The fragmented structure of film carries the viewer’s attention with it, and distracts it in the sense that at such moments conscious reflection is impossible. In order to illustrate this distracted manner of seeing, Benjamin quotes Georges Duhamel, who, incidentally, and unlike Benjamin, regarded film as a great danger: “I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images” (qtd. in Benjamin 238). But the discontinuity

in the sequence of film images and the “shock” that this brings about in the viewer ends up facilitating a “heightened presence of mind”:

The distracted person, too, can form habits. More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their solution has become a matter of habit. Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception. . . . Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasingly noticeable in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true mode of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult value recede into the background, not only by putting the public in the position of critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one. (Benjamin 240)

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At first sight, the “reception in a state of distraction” that Benjamin regarded as having been triggered by the new media takes on paradoxical forms. Because subjects are no longer capable of organizing and anticipating their own perceptions, and because they are distracted by discontinuous sensory impressions, they become capable of attaining new or higher insights. According to this notion of things, distraction is an element of attention, seen as a dialectic apparatus. The subject who gets these new insights is, however, not the same subject as the one proposed by the Enlightenment who acquired insight by means of controlled observation and rationality. The subject of modernity acquires insight while being subjected to a mechanical process, unintendedly and accidentally.

The notion of subjectivity in modernity described so far differs radically from conventional notions of the subject in Modernism. According to the conventional view, the modernist subject is not characterized by distraction, disintegration, loss of self and inability to experience the world, but by distanced observation, reserved intellectualism, scepticism and irony, and a pursuit of an authentic self.¹ These qualities seem to embody a notion of strong individualistic subjectivity rather than the loss of it. I will, however, rearticulate these two opposed notions of subjectivity as a distinction between the world-sensitive subjectivity and the defensive subject. But how can a strong, individualistic subjectivity be seen as “defensive”?

In order to solve the apparent contradiction between modernity and literary modernism, in order to historicize, as well as to argue that the individualistic subject is a defensive one, I will invoke one of the most important

¹ See, for example, Fokkema and Ibsch (24).

and canonical essays written about modernity, and moreover, written in the middle of it, in 1903: “The Metropolis and Mental Life” by the German sociologist Georg Simmel. Like Baudelaire before him and Benjamin after him, Simmel describes the psychological foundation of metropolitan subjectivity as determined by the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli. “Lasting impressions, the slightness in their differences, the habituated regularity of their course and contrasts between them, consume, so to speak, less mental energy than the rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli” (Simmel 325). This metropolitan life stands in sharp contrast to the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory-mental phase of small-town and rural existence.

But the metropolitan subject does not just let itself be annihilated by these violent stimuli. It has its defense mechanisms:

Thus the metropolitan type—which naturally takes on a thousand individual modifications—creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner, thus creating a mental predominance through the intensification of consciousness, which in turn is caused by it. Thus the reaction of the metropolitan person to those events is moved to a sphere of mental activity, which is least sensitive, and which is furthest removed from the depths of the personality. (Simmel 325)

Simmel sees the intellectualistic character of the mental life of the metropolitan subject as a protection of the inner life against the sovereign powers of the metropolis. Yet, it is not only its intellectualism but also its reserve which protects the subject from being overwhelmed by modern urban life:

If the unceasing external contact of numbers of persons in the city should be met by the same number of inner reactions as in the small town, in which one knows almost every person he meets and to each of whom he has a positive relationship, one would be completely atomised internally and would fall into an unthinkable mental condition. (Simmel 331)

According to Simmel, it is because of the lack of space and bodily closeness in the dense crowds of the metropolis that mutual reserve, indifference and

the intellectual conditions of life become perceivable and significant for the first time.

Simmel's diagnosis of mental life in the metropolis does resolve the contradiction between notions of modernity as, on the one hand, being defined by a crisis of the senses (Crary) or by traumatic shock and the dissolution of experience (Baer), and, on the other hand, literary modernism as it is seen by mainstream criticism. Both distanced observation, reserved intellectualism, scepticism, irony and the pursuit of authenticity that characterizes literary modernism in conventional construction of it, as well as the world-sensitive modernism as distinguished by Benjamin, are a protection against the loss of self which threatens the subject living under the conditions of modernity. This implies a reversal of the kind of relation between the features of literary modernism and history as postulated by Fokkema and Ibsch, two Dutch scholars who have written on literary modernism. For them, the independent intellectualism and reserve of the modernist subject is not a defense strategy, but the foundation of individual subjectivity as such. They explain, for instance, the allegedly marginal role of the events of the First World War in Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* and in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* as follows:

In the Modernist world of experience, everything, even the events of war, is filtered by consciousness; historical events are made subordinate to the vision of the pondering, evaluating subject, which will never give up its independence. (Fokkema and Ibsch 34, my translation)

However, when we try to understand modernism contextually, instead of formalistically, it becomes necessary to conclude that it is not a matter of holding on to independence, as if wilfully, but of armouring the self by means of intellectualism and reserve against overwhelming threats to it. This is what I meant above by a defensive identity. It will be clear by now that this armouring of the self does not safeguard the self. The Austrian modernist writer Herman Broch articulates clearly why modernist intellectualism is compulsive instead of controlled: "The highly-developed rationality of modern metropolitan culture does not at all mitigate the human twilight, rather it intensifies it. The accepted *ratio* becomes a mere means for the satisfaction of drives and thus is robbed of its content as knowledge of the whole" (qtd. in Miller 40). According to Tyrus Miller, rationality had embarked on a journey to the end of the night (alluding to the title of Louis-Ferdinand Céline's 1932 novel), namely, reducing the individual subject to, in Beckett's words, "a peristalsis of light, worming its way into the dark" (Miller 40). This is a far cry from the triumphant

rational subject to which critics tend to cling. But it is also an overcoming of the split alleged by critics more sensitive to other kinds of modernist literature and art, the kinds that can now be considered more daring, looking the condition of modernity more directly in the face.²

These transformations of the perceptual field and the subsequent rise of new, modernist subjectivities can also inflect and enrich our understanding of Munch's painting. Rather than commenting on specific paintings, I will reflect more generally on his style. Munch has sometimes been considered as not modern enough because although there is always a tension between figuration and abstraction in his works, he remained committed to the "traditional" mode of figuration (Prelinger 156). The turn to abstraction was seductive to many artists of his generation; Munch, however, never fully embraced that style of painting. The way Munch's abstract gestures or elements of his paintings are usually read is as expressive, not depicting an object or figure, but expressing the sensibility of the artist. This sensibility can then be read in the moving gestures of paint.

In the conventional account of abstract painting, abstraction is the binary opposite of figuration. When painting is purified from figuration, abstraction is the result. It is usually Mondrian's development that is used to exemplify this binary notion of abstraction as purification and that constructs abstraction as the radical other of figuration. Since then, different, less binary conceptions of abstraction have been brought up. In her study on Munch, *Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways*, Mieke Bal proposes to consider figuration and abstraction not as opposing modes of painting, but as modes of painting which are in dialogue (201). The abstract elements in Munch's works signify gesture; gestures that visualize the work of the painter as painterly realization of the work. With this foregrounding of the notion of gesture, she turns to a specifically gesture- and painting-oriented figural element, the hand. She argues about Munch's painting *The Wedding of the Bohemian* the following: "We have seen the one [hand] of the bride in *The Wedding of the Bohemian*, a bit of surface at the extremity of an equally poorly painted arm, the point of which was not depiction but signifying gesture" (200). She reads the poorly painted hands in *Self-Portrait with Bottles* (1938) in a similar way: "In this work I submit, it serves primarily to indicate the work of the hand with pigment and brush—art's material relations as never to be overlooked, which might happen when we focus too narrowly on the depiction" (203). The kind of dialogue between depiction and abstraction Bal describes assigns different semiotic

² This account of subjectivity and distraction was based on my earlier article, "Figurations of Self: Modernism and Distraction" (339–46).

functions to depiction and abstraction. Depiction represents figures and objects, whereas abstraction signifies gestures and the painterly realization of the work. In Munch's works both painterly functions are always combined, although the degrees in them can differ.

Bal also refers to Jonathan Crary's work on modernity and attention in order to see what the repercussions of his view are on abstraction: "Abstraction in this sense is a lack of attention. The paradoxical consequence is a distraction from the motif to the painterly realisation. This figural distraction leads to attention to the paint for its own sake; to materiality" (209). I would like to suggest another reading of the role of abstraction in Munch's work in view of the distraction I have analyzed so far. In this reading, the lack of attention does not lead us away from depiction but qualifies another kind of depiction. Munch illuminates how, as modernity caused fundamental changes in the perceptual field, figuration was no longer focused on the depiction of figures and objects, but *on the depiction of the perception* of figures and objects. It is these perceptions of figures and objects that, with modernity, become "distracted." The depiction of distracted perceptions is given form by means of abstraction. Distraction, then, does not imply a displacement from figuration to abstraction, but inserts a self-reflexive moment or gesture, into the process of figuration. One does not paint the object world, but the way one sees the object world—distractedly.

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Timespace for Emotions: Anachronism
in Flaubert, Bal/Williams Gamaker,
Munch and Knausgård

ABSTRACT

Quoting Flaubert through time, Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker's *Madame B* brings *Madame Bovary's* reflections on love and emotions to the present day, in a productive anachronism. Their work produces an intertemporal space where the past is relevant for the present, and the present enables us to understand the past. Intimacy and routine are central in their exploration of Flaubert's contemporaneity. Those issues are precisely one of the keys in Karl Ove Knausgård's project of literary autobiography, where he expands narration foreclosing the ellipsis and giving visibility to small things and emotions; a project with some resonances with Munch's crude-obscene uses of intimacy. This essay explores how both proposals, Bal and Williams Gamaker in film, and Knausgård in literature, can serve us to connect present and past sensibilities and, more than that, demonstrate resistances to the hegemonic discourses of temporality.

Keywords: timespace, anachronism, autobiography, exhibitions, intimacy.

Emma & Edvard: Love in the Time of Loneliness, the exhibition curated by Mieke Bal at the Munch Museum (Oslo, 28 January–17 April 2017), is a device for thinking. As Mieke Bal accurately states in the book-catalogue, curating, the creation of a contact zone between art and viewers, “could be considered a medium in its own right” (18). Without a doubt, exhibitions think and make us think. Even more so in this case, where, through the confrontation of different tenses, times, spaces, formats, visions or media, it opens a process of thought. Above all, it opens a space for discussion, an inter-temporal space. This is what happens in the exhibition, the opening of a new space, the creation of a sort of device for dialogue and conversation, a “timespace” where works, ideas, visions and experiences enrich one another.

The video installation *Madame B* (2014) establishes an intertemporal conversation with Gustave Flaubert. Quoting the author through time, Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker’s *Madame B* transports Madame Bovary’s reflections on love and emotions to the present day in a productive anachronism. And now, with this exhibition, this intertemporal dialogue is transformed into a sort of device to read, see, experience and, in consequence, activate the work of Edvard Munch, making his art engage with the present. So, the dialogic (intertemporal) structure of *Madame B* works here as a device for the activation of the past. It’s a triologue: Flaubert, Munch, Bal/Williams Gamaker.

Due to its power and productiveness, I find here an element with an even greater potential: the capacity to expand that conversation, to open it up to other visions. This is what’s happening during the conference and in this journal with figures such as Ibsen or Charlotte Salomon. And this is precisely why I decided to invite Karl Ove Knausgård to engage in this conversation through time. As I will try to show, his autobiographical project *My Struggle* (*Min kamp*, 2009–11) has something to say about the conversation taking place at the Munch Museum. And, conversely, the experience of the exhibition makes us read and consider Knausgård’s work from a different (and, I believe, richer) perspective.

In this text I focus my analysis on the issue of time.¹ In *Madame B*, in the exhibition *Emma & Edvard*, and also in Knausgård’s project. These three subjects present alternatives to what we could call “the monochronic regime of modernity,” the hegemonic model of time characterized, broadly speaking, by acceleration, linearity and capitalization of experience, where emotions are also capitalized. By the deployment of anachronism, montage, altered time,

¹ For a recent survey on this key issue, see Burges and Elias. On time and contemporary art, see Ross, Groom, Moxey, Speranza.

denaturalized movement, repetition, extension, interruption—in brief—by dismounting time, these works (and this exhibition) resist modern time by creating a *timespace* where, among other things, emotions can have a place.

QUOTING (IN) TIME: *MADAME B* AND THE DIALOGUE OF IMAGES

In “What Is the Contemporary?”, Giorgio Agamben states that being contemporary is to maintain a particular relationship with the present, a sort of distancing or anachronism:

Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one’s own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it’s *that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism*. (43, emphasis added)

Being contemporary is based on admitting the crossover of different temporalities in the present, on understanding that time is, by its own nature, heterochronic.

In a similar vein, Georges Didi-Huberman links Agamben’s ideas on the contemporary to the process of montage, in the sense given by Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin, as an intertwining of times:

The montage is an *exhibition of anachronisms* precisely because it proceeds like an *explosion of chronology*. The montage cuts up things that are usually connected and connects things that are usually separate. It thus creates a shake and a movement. (59, my translation)

For him, being contemporary has to do with an opening up of time, destroying the illusion of unity and contributing to showing its intertwining. *Madame B* displays this sense of contemporariness as an opening of time. Past and present tenses are moved and a dialogue in time is produced.

Precisely, the issue of dialogue is central in the *Madame B* videos. The work of Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker is a dialogue in itself, a collaborative *oeuvre*. Their early projects in migratory aesthetics revolve around “the other.” The dialogue and confrontation “between two people” always has a central role. Practically all their videos are characterized by this dialogic aspect, even in the way of showing, which requires the presence of a spectator capable of engaging in a conversation with the image.²

² This is the core of the exhibitions *Towards the Other* (Veits) and *La última frontera/ The Last Frontier* (Hernández Navarro).

This is also true for the projects created by Mieke Bal alone (like *Nothing is Missing*) and something similar could also be seen in their previous project, *A Long History of Madness*, in which the dialogic aspect of the structure—situations of characters in a situation of conflict trying to have a conversation and reach a point of understanding—is complemented by the dialogue of the film with *Mère Folle*, the book written by French psychoanalyst Françoise Davoine. *Madame B* (the film and the installation) builds on this way of working through dialogue and conversation and expands on it through time. Dialogue is produced with Flaubert's work in a sort of intertemporal space. It is a conversation that takes place at multiple levels.³

Madame B is not an adaptation, a version or even a visual reading—at least in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, we are confronted with an intervention that speaks with and activates the previous work of art (*Madame Bovary*). In this regard, what *Madame B* does with Flaubert's novel could be understood as a sort of historical performance, a reenactment. Intervention in the present is a way of evoking and transforming history. In this sense, Bal and Williams Gamaker's work would be similar to the series of “historical performances” carried out by artists like Jeremy Deller, in his parodic recreation of the Battle of Orgreave (*The Battle of Orgreave (An Injury to One is an Injury to All)*, 2001) or Doris Salcedo, in her evocation of the assault on the Palace of Justice in Colombia in November 1985 (*Noviembre 6 y 7*, 2002).⁴ These are ways of not only con-vo-king history as a tangible reverberation in the present, but also of establishing in it a difference capable of transforming it. In a book on the recent concern for history in contemporary art, I called these practices “Art of History” (*Materializar el pasado* 11). In a similar way, Ernst van Alphen refers to this reflection on the past as “new historiography” (256–66). I regard *Madame B* as part of this “tendency” in contemporary art, considering that the novel and what it produces is part of reality, namely, part of the past, history in its own right.

Working through the insertion in a previous work, fraught with problems, images and experiences that are already “in motion,” is fundamental for Bal and Williams Gamaker. The world is not created out of nothing; it's already there, even before we see it. There is a previous symbolic structure to which the individual is subjected. This circle of meaning is the only one in which artists can intervene, entering into a previous conversation or putting themselves in the position of conversational partner of those who

³ See Hernández Navarro (“Moverse en el tiempo”).

⁴ On the strategy of “reenactment” in contemporary art, see Arns and Horn. On Doris Salcedo and the political, see Bal (*Of What One Cannot Speak*).

are already talking, precisely so that others can hear them and have their say afterwards.

Madame B is located in the conversational space of Flaubert. The work is an intervention in this previous space and an update of the conversation. Producing a work that enters into dialogue with time in order to converse with Flaubert has, in this case, an additional meaning. For, *Madame Bovary* itself—as an essential part of Flaubert’s work—is a novel that understands creation in this way. It recycles clichés coming from the romantic novel, which Flaubert gradually undermines. The meaning of the world presented in *Madame Bovary* is based on the idea that the conversation, the language, and the experience of the world are constructed.

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In the novel, just as in the installation, we can see how the education of Emma gradually develops and creates her horizon of expectations. Education, from the beginning, is the space in which, almost in a Foucauldian way, power and systems are introduced to and reproduced in individuals. To this regulated education, which intervenes in our experiences of the world, Flaubert adds, especially in Emma’s case, construction through romantic education, created through novels, which are not only shown as a space of imagination, a way of escaping, but also as a space to create collective imagination and expectations.

As Eva Illouz exposes in her brilliant pages devoted to romantic fantasy, for Flaubert this fantasy is constructed through the act of reading and “the capacity of the novel to elicit identification and imagination” (203). In *Madame B*, the identification processes take place through the use of cinema and publicity, the places from which, today, that construction is undertaken. In Emma’s face we can see, for example, a reflection of the creation of this imagination through television. Almost as if it were the Ludovico technique from Kubrick’s 1971 film *The Clockwork Orange*, the subject becomes more and more captivated by the image. Thus, *Madame B* updates the Flaubertian sense of how the imagination is built from outside.

In Flaubert’s work, the novel functions as a strange interruption of meaning in the repetition of clichés. It calls our attention to its artificiality. It is precisely in this that its critical position resides. Emma develops her imagination through romantic novels and reading. However, *Madame Bovary*, as a novel, also contributes to the creation of clichés. It is just another brick in the wall surrounding the imagination. Flaubert’s strategy to break through this—or at least to bridge the gap and situate it in a place beyond—is self-awareness, as with Cervantes. The imagination of *Don Quixote* is developed through reading. That of Emma is, too. In both cases, the book, through literary self-consciousness, is based on a previous discourse in order to perform a rupture with it.

In the case of *Madame B*, the break is made clear both through the rupture of the narration and through self-awareness. The film or the installation do not contribute, as romantic films do, to the consolidation of stereotypes or the deepening of romantic fantasies, but to the opposite: to highlight the processes of how this imagination is constructed and to create flaws and interruptions in its flow. And in order to do this, to destroy clichés and to interrupt the flow of meaning, Bal and Williams Gamaker implement a change in media, by switching from the novel to the video installation form.

As Boris Groys has pointed out, “installation is for our time what the novel was for the nineteenth century” (77). It is the medium par excellence of contemporary art. It puts things into context by re-signifying them in time and space. This re-signification is created here by placing the spectator in the midst of the problems, facing the screens, soaked up in the image just as Emma is by discourses. In contrast to the authoritarian and imposing models of cinema, here the spectator can wander around from one space to another. The narrative is not “inserted” into him or her, but rather shown at a critical distance. The observer is not constructed by the discourse, then; rather, he or she *is* a constructor. In order to do this, the structure of the installation is of utmost importance, as it expands into the space and “cuts” up the story into different fragments, identifying issues, feelings, topics, problems or ideas. This dismantling of narration helps the viewer to be aware of the artificial character of the discourse, as well as of the quotability of the images. The spectator is invited to an encounter in which he or she is able to recognize and feel what in real space is not always evident.

This change of medium, from novel to installation, also implies a temporal alteration, a change of times. In his study of *Madame Bovary*, Mario Vargas Llosa suggested four time models in Flaubert’s novel: singular, circular, plastic and imaginary (168–83). In the first place, there is the time of the event, “a singular or specific time” (170). The things that happen and that make the novel move forward: someone comes in, something moves, something happens etc. It is also possible to identify a circular time: the time of routine (172). Whereas the first time is formulated in a specific way—“the director came in . . .”—the second is a condensed time that summarizes a series of situations:

But it was at mealtimes, especially, that she could not bear it any longer. . . . Charles was a slow eater, and she would nibble a few nuts or, leaning on her elbow, amuse herself drawing lines on the oilcloth with the point of her knife. (Flaubert 59)

In the visual domain, this summarized and condensed time can only be shown through the repetition of events. And in *Madame B* we can see

this, for example, in the times of routine actions or in the conversations over meals between Charles and Emma, a circular time that is emphasized through repetition. In the novel, these are synthesized by using specific tenses or structures to indicate these routines. Here, in the image, they are suggested through the chain succession of planes. In this time of repetition, circular time and the time of the event are in contact. Abstract time, indeed, is obtained through the sum of various specific, routine actions.

Vargas Llosa observes a third time, which is the “immobile time or plastic eternity” (177). This is the time of descriptions, the time of objects, but also, at some point, the time of people that are treated like objects. “This temporal plane,” says Vargas Llosa, “gives the novel its physical depth, that materiality with which we associate the name of Flaubert” (178). In *Madame B*, this immobile time can be seen in the things, in the frame, in the detail of the objects. It is neither the time of events nor abstract time; it is an almost photographic, plastic time. It is a present, almost timeless time. That “now” of the descriptions can be found in the profound materiality that each frame possesses. A materiality fostered by the density of what is revealed. At the actual moment in which the experience is dematerialized and liquefied, the screens of *Madame B* show dense bodies, and also colours and objects that are not transparent, but rather shown in their opacity. They are not merely decorative: they are context; they work as characters. At all times, the spectator has the feeling of living in a full-bodied world. It is not a virtual reality in which things are illusory and look real; it is not a simulation. Rather, the image suggests to us a dense life and, thus, an aesthetic experience.

Finally, along with the time of events, circular time and plastic time, we can identify “imaginary time” (Vargas Llosa 179). This is the subjective time of the characters, the time that we cannot see, the experience of duration that is different for each subject. It is a time that is neither historic nor quantifiable, the time of expectation, the time of frustration, of waiting, of desire, of intimacy. In the novel, this time appears through free indirect style, which implies the narration of a historic time with the cadence of thought, which is transferred in barely one sentence from the narrator to the mind of the character. In *Madame B*, that time can be seen in the faces of the actors which transmit the intensity of the emotion beyond language. Faces, like Emma’s, which at times become impenetrable precisely in order to give an account of the impossibility of showing publicly something which is exclusively individual and intimate, no matter how much of it has been built up from the outside.

As happens in the novel, in the installation the four times function simultaneously. However, within the space of the exhibition, these times are opened up and the spectator is even more aware of the experience of

a temporal multiplicity, the experience of the complex, multiple texture of time that Mieke Bal has called heterochrony (“Heterochrony in the Act”). This is even more emphasized through the introduction of a new time: the time of perceptive experience. The fragmented structure that breaks up the linear narration proposes to the spectator the same time of the construction of the story, which is not set by the author, but rather produced in the mind and body—in the senses, that is—of the audience. Even though it is true that there is a plot and a defined trajectory, the spectators can make their own way through it and build their own story. Even when they follow the predetermined path, the multiplicity of screens, narrations, and visual and auditory stimuli confronting them cause breaks in the linearity of the novel’s temporal succession. Even the time spectators devote to each image, the possibility of not capturing the details, of looking at some images longer than at others, all give sovereignty to their perception. They end up becoming virtual narrators, at least for themselves, of the story.

Thus, more than telling a story, Bal and Williams Gamaker *deploy* one, opening it up in order to make it work. They break Flaubert’s structure and, at the same time, give it a relevant meaning: putting Flaubert in touch with the present. When viewing the screens, when immersed in the installation, we still feel that Emma’s story is our own. Emma’s concerns and obsessions, her feelings, are not a matter of the past, but something that clearly affects us in the present.

Returning again to Agamben’s words, we can say that the contemporary

is also the one who, dividing and interpolating time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times. He is able to read history in unforeseen ways, to “cite it” according to a necessity that does not arise in any way from his will, but from an exigency to which he cannot not respond. (“What Is the Contemporary” 53)

The contemporary brings the past into the present, so it can express what could not be said in its own time or, as Walter Benjamin suggested, to “read what was never written” (405). To actualize Flaubert is, in this way, to connect him to the present, but also to create a timespace compound of the past that could not be expressed and of the present that can only be seen thanks to those latent aspects of the past. To use Agamben’s formula, “to be contemporary means in this sense to return to a present where we have never been” (“What Is the Contemporary” 51–52); “it is like being on time for an appointment that one cannot but miss” (46). *Madame B* creates the timespace for this appointment. And

in the exhibition *Emma & Edvard*, the installation expands its terms to include Edvard Munch's art in the equation, exploring the relevance of his painting to our current world and sensibility. The inclusive character of this dialogic device activates the possibility for other appointments, other encounters. Not only the exhibition, but also everything that surrounds it (the conference held on 23 and 24 March; the book *Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways*, but also the spectator's memory), could then be conceived of as a sort of magnetic field, a vortex that attracts actors to the stage.

EXPANDED TIME: KNAUSGÅRD'S ANACHRONISMS

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Just by serendipity, when I received the invitation to participate in the conference in Oslo, I was reading the Spanish translation of the first book of *My Struggle*, the outstanding six-volume autobiographical novel written by Karl Ove Knausgård. Although I'm not a literary scholar and I was reading it purely for pleasure, for some reason I felt that this book was indeed pertinent to the discussion being held at the conference.⁵

After its international success, Knausgård's well-known autobiographical project of 3600 pages is being translated into Spanish and five of the six volumes have been published to date by Anagrama. In Spain, as in many other contexts, *My Struggle* has also become a centre of debate and discussion about the limits of fiction, the ethics of storytelling, the issue of memory and the exhibition of intimacy (Aguilar). Although Knausgård's project has been compared constantly with Proust—at least in its ambition and the attempt to construct a long-term memory (Schmitt and Kjerkegaard, Hobby, Sturgeon)—there is an atmosphere, a vision of the modern self, of intimacy, of modern life, a sense of loneliness, something that matches the paintings by Munch.

Munch is explicitly mentioned, albeit briefly, on a number of occasions throughout the volumes of Knausgård's work. For example, in the first book he refers to Munch after describing a particular sensation:

These sudden states of clear-sightedness that everyone must know, where for a few seconds you catch sight of another world from the one you were in only a moment earlier, where the world seems to step forward and show itself for a brief glimpse before reverting and leaving everything as before. (246)

⁵ At the time, I did not know that Knausgård was going to be the curator of *Toward the Forest: Knausgård on Munch*, precisely at the Munch Museum (5 June–8 October 2017).

He has this feeling, observing outdoor nature during a train journey or contemplating some artworks. And, at that point, he refers to Munch as the painter that transformed nature into something human: "It is," he says, "as if humans swallow up everything, make everything theirs. The mountains, the sea, the trees and the forests, everything is coloured by humanness" (248).

It is remarkable that this passage—one of the micro-essays or digressions scattered throughout the volumes—ends up in a reflection on death, the death of bodies, the body of the father. This death is precisely, as James Wood claims, what really triggers the narration.

When I started to read Mieke Bal's *Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways* so as to familiarize myself with the exhibition's conception, the subjects, the concepts, the frames of interpretation and experience, I was strongly aware of how *My Struggle*, beyond the explicit references to the painter, deployed a way of seeing the world that really conversed with Munch's painting. And not only with Munch, but also with Flaubert, with *Madame B* and with the exhibition in which all these visions work together. From the moment I read Bal's book, I started reading Knausgård from a new perspective, from that which Munch activated by the powerful device curated by Mieke Bal. And, instantly, I noticed that many of the issues examined by Bal in her book were also present, in one way or another, in Knausgård's work.

One of the first issues is, of course, the presence of a narrator-character through whom we see the world: a focalizer (Bal, *Emma and Edvard* 49). In the same sense that Bal speaks of Emma or Edvard, here we can speak of Karl Ove, the narrator-character, the protagonist of his own self-presentations, as a fictional figure, that is, that produced by figuration. It does not matter if this character, Karl Ove, corresponds with the real author, Karl Ove Knausgård; or even if the things narrated, or the world, are based on actual facts. As the same author emphasizes, *My Struggle* is a novel, not a memoir (Knausgård and Wood). The character-narrator is therefore the product of a process of figuration. It is curious that, as soon as we pick up the novel, we forget the real Knausgård to begin the dialogue with Karl Ove, actually the one through whose eyes we can see, experience and understand the world. We do not care about Knausgård as much as we do about Karl Ove. Beyond the issues appearing in the volumes of his book, such as solitude, the understanding of modern life as lacking authenticity, the question of identity, intimacy and social roles, what interests me about Knausgård project is the work with time. I think that this is precisely one of the most powerful elements of the book, and also one of the problems that strongly links *My Struggle* with the works in the exhibition *Emma & Edvard*.

This use of time is primarily displayed through a discontinuous memory, made of leaps and returns; a memory where different tenses affect and touch each other. The structure of the novel is built through an alteration of linearity. There is no logical order in the succession of books—the death of the father, life with his second wife, childhood, youth—or in the successions of memories in each book. Memory is not a continuous line, but a series of moments, expanded scenes, feelings, routines, events, and more, presented without any kind of order. Memories come and go. Tenses are often confused. The different pasts contaminate each other. The reading experience is mobilized. There are moments in which the reader cannot know exactly *when* he or she is. Everything becomes anachronism. The only thing that maintains the reader's anchoring is that everything is written from a present, that the flux of memories is created here and now. In this manner, memory is produced in the present.⁶

Those time-lapses focus our attention on the same medium. They could be regarded as similar to the “mistakes” that Bal notices in Munch or Flaubert; the flaws that break the illusion of transparency and underscore the artificiality of the medium (*Emma and Edvard* 34–37). The presence of these “mistakes” is a constant in *My Struggle*. Not only can they be glimpsed in the rupture of linearity, in the disorder of the fragments, but also in the rapid and striking jumps from one scene to another, from one tense to another, as if the writer didn't know how to work with ellipsis. Moreover, these “mistakes” can be seen in the way in which he gives importance to banal moments or infinite conversations, at the expense of other supposedly more important and quickly resolved ones, or in the use of language in non-literary language, mainly in the dialogues. There is a carelessness in the form of writing in some passages, in comparison with others. This neglect brings us back to what Bal suggests about Munch's technical “mistakes,” according to the standards of realism (*Emma and Edvard* 37). To produce these mistakes consciously is a way of highlighting the same capacity—or incapacity—of the medium to translate reality.

Needless to say, one of the mistakes that writers who want to tell a story cannot make, following the standards of standard narrativity, is the slowdown of the rhythms of scenes and the minute detail of banal routine events and situations. But Knausgård can painstakingly describe processes, objects, feelings or spaces. This is the routine time that Vargas Llosa referred to in relation to Flaubert—a time that in Knausgård is also

⁶ See Bal, Crewe and Spitzer.

the time of objects; the time of world materiality. In this time, nothing of importance happens, but the world expands and morphs into something material, tangible; a dense, substantial place.

This expanded time is a constant. In the first book, for example, it is quite relevant in the almost 60 pages describing the preparations for a boozy New Year's Eve party for youngsters, or the more than 100 pages describing the process of cleaning Knausgård's father's house after his death. The excessively detailed description forces the reader to share the experience, room by room:

When the last bottle had been taken and I had been given a receipt I joined Yngve, who was standing in front of the household detergents section. We took Jif for the bathroom, Jif for the kitchen, Ajax all-purpose cleaner, Ajax window cleaner, Klorin disinfectant, Mr Muscle for extra-difficult stains, an oven cleaner, a special chemical product for sofas, steel wool, sponges, kitchen cloths, floor rags, two buckets and a broom from this aisle, some fresh rissoles from the meat counter, potatoes and a cauliflower from the vegetable section. Apart from that, things to put on bread, milk, coffee, fruit, a tray of yoghurts and a few packets of biscuits. (333–34)

This is on the borderline of tedium, requiring from the reader a strange attention. As James Wood states, “there is something ceaselessly compelling about Knausgård's book: even when I was bored, I was interested.” This interest is far from being a morbid or voyeuristic curiosity. Actually, the exhibition of intimacy taking place in *My Struggle* is clearly different from the exhibitionism of social networks or media—the spectacularization of the intimacy and emotions, as happens on Facebook, where our life becomes a superficial, banal image. The way Knausgård works with routine, intimacy or everyday life, is deterrent, dissuasive for the reader's curiosity. It requires attention and also a disposition to share the world of memories. To maintain this attention a bodily engagement is also required. We imagine the body of the character-narrator, but also that of the writer penning these exasperating passages, and our own bodies in tension; a never solved tension that keeps us on the move.

As the Argentinean writer Graciela Speranza indicates, Knausgård's project is about the expansion of reading time to the limit of tedium, in order to allow readers to inhabit the place, hosting there their own mental drift, their own dispenser of memories (145–50). *My Struggle* opens memory and creates a space for actions, digressions, descriptions. More than the flux of memories, what really matters is the world that has been

created, the place for memory; a place that is not so different from the exhibition space. Whatever happens, whatever is told is not as important as the creation of the possibility to tell them, the creation of a world to be inhabited; a world where everyday life can be deployed beyond the accelerated rhythm of our fast, modern world.

CONCLUSION

Graciela Speranza examines Knausgård's work in relation to the more general tendency in contemporary art to overflow established time models, especially what we can call "modern time," described by thinkers like Hartmut Rosa not only as a continuous process of acceleration, but also as a global process of synchronization with the "Western Hour," the monochronic time of capitalism (xx). In this scenario of acceleration and dematerialization of life experience, where even intimacy and emotions have been subsumed by capitalism—emotional capitalism, following Eva Illouz—art constitutes an interruption, a place for resistance.

The authors that I discuss in this essay—Munch, Flaubert, Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker, and Karl Ove Knausgård—operate precisely from that space of resistance; a physical space, but also a mental space. A space that, above all, can be considered a laboratory, in the sense understood by Néstor García Canclini: a place to experiment with ways of relation, of thinking, of experience, of inhabiting the world (xi). This social laboratory has a concrete place (the exhibition space or the work of art), but its scope is projected onto the living world. The power of art, the capacity of affecting and mobilizing us is to be found, above all, in its faculty to reverberate in the world beyond the museum. After all, when we spectators leave a museum, when we depart from the immersion in an artistic space, when we close a book and return to "real life," our body remains the same. If some transformation has been produced, this reverberates in the living world. If a change in our experience of time has occurred, this time does not disappear, but travels with us, like a wake, in life.

In *Infancy and History*, discussing Walter Benjamin and the concept of revolution, Giorgio Agamben states: "the original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to 'change the world,' but also—and above all—to 'change time'" (91). Here, we could say that to change time in the exhibition space, to change it in our way of experiencing the work of art, to change it like Mieke Bal does in the exhibition *Emma & Edvard*, is not a small change in a limited space; on the contrary, it has to be seen as a big step forward *vis-à-vis* the possibility to move the world forward.

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Staging Subjectivity: Love and Loneliness in the Scene of Painting with Charlotte Salomon and Edvard Munch

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a conversation between Charlotte Salomon (1917–43) and Edvard Munch that is premised on a reading of Charlotte Salomon’s monumental project of 784 paintings forming a single work *Leben? oder Theater?* (1941–42) as itself a reading of potentialities for painting, as a staging of subjectivity in the work of Edvard Munch, notably in his assembling paintings to form the *Frieze of Life*. Drawing on both Mieke Bal’s critical concept of “preposterous history” and my own project of “the virtual feminist museum” as a framework for tracing resonances that are never influences or descent in conventional art historical terms, this paper traces creative links between the serial paintings of these two artists across the shared thematic of loneliness and psychological extremity mediated by the legacy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Keywords: Edvard Munch, Charlotte Salomon, subjectivity, painting, loneliness, Friedrich Nietzsche.

It was summer. There were trees and sky and sea. I saw nothing else. Only colours, paintbrush and you, and this. All people became too much for me. I had to go further into solitude, completely away from all people. Then maybe I could find—what I had to find: namely myself: a name for me. So I began the [work] *Life and Theatre*.

Charlotte Salomon, “Postscript,” JHM 4930–4931; excluded from redacted work *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1943¹ (Watson 428)

In terms of artworks about love and loneliness, about the visual image as a staging of psychological and social condition of a subjectivity in crisis, the singular object that is *Leben? oder Theater?* (*Life? or Theatre?*) by the German Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon (1917–43) is a prime candidate. This year marks the centenary of the birth of a young woman who trained as an artist in Berlin in the mid-1930s, and painted her monumental artwork of 784 paintings in one year between 1941 and 1942 in exile in the South of France. She reviewed it six months later in early 1943, dividing it into three parts: a “Prologue,” a “Main Part” and an “Epilogue” before handing it over for safekeeping to a doctor in Nice. Then in September 1943, Charlotte Salomon was hunted down by the Gestapo, deported and murdered in Auschwitz by the Third Reich on 10 October 1943, aged 26.

The paintings that form *Leben? oder Theater?* as a single project were created by artist who signed her work with the cipher CS, a visual and lexical veil that disguised both her gender and her ethnicity—both sites of her acute political vulnerability in her terrifying historical situation. Her work displays the artist’s encounter with popular culture, with both the Expressionism of

¹ Charlotte Salomon’s *Leben? oder Theater?* can be studied at <http://www.charlottesalomon.nl/collection/specials/charlotte-salomon/leben-oder-theater>. JHM numbers in this text refer to the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam collection on this internet site. It also allows viewers to see the overlays and hear the musical motifs suggested for the paintings. I will refer readers to images I cannot reproduce by this coding. The “Postscript” from which I am quoting here is numbered JHM 4930–31. Original reads: “Wenn ich nicht Freude habe am leben und an der Arbeit nehme ich mir das Leben . . . Es war Sommer, Es gab Bäume, Und Himmel und Meer, etwas anderes sah ich nicht. Nur Farben, Pinsel, dich und dies. Alle Menschen wurden zuviel, ich mußte noch weiter in die Einsamkeit, ganz fort von allen Menschen, dann könnte ich vielleicht finden, was ich finden mußte—nämlich mich selbst: einen Name für mich—so fing ich das Leben und Theater an . . . Der Krieg tobte weiter und ich sass am der Meer und sah tief hinein in die Herzen der Menschen; ich war meine Mutter, meine Grossmütter, ja, alle Personen, die vorkommen in meinem Stück war ich selbst. Alle Wege lernte ich gehen and wurde ich selbst.” This text was translated by Julia Watson. I have made some adjustments to the translation to keep the German formulations in view even while the translations are correct. Redaction refers to the selection of 784 paintings out of a larger total which were not numbered as part of the final work, many of them having the images taped over, or their versos being used for works that were included and numbered in the redacted final version.

German silent cinema and with the sound and colour cinema that emerged in the 1930s, the period of her studies and artistic formation. Yet, Salomon's work was also in conversation with modernist art just as all modernism was being systematically excluded from Nazi Germany, showing its knowledge of Van Gogh, Chagall and, of course, Edvard Munch.

CS's interrogative title *Leben? oder Theater?* already invites us to muse on deeper connections between her grand painting project and Edvard Munch's *Frieze of Life*. Over time, Munch combined individual paintings dating from 1888–89 to constitute "a series of frequently treated synthetic depictions of life and love, suffering and death" that formed a "frieze" for exhibition at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in 1897 and in 1902 and 1904 at Blomquist's Gallery in Oslo, and again there in 1918. It was last shown in a massive retrospective in the National Galleries of Berlin and Oslo in 1927 (when Charlotte Salomon, born in Berlin, was but 10 years old) (Heller 26–27). From his writings, we learn that Munch was interested in a series at whose heart he placed "moods, impressions of life of the soul, and together they represent one aspect of the battle, between man and woman, that is called love" (Munch Museum Archives MS N 30; qtd. in Heller 33). More numerous (784 paintings in total) but on a less monumental scale (32.5 x 25 cm each), the paintings of *Leben? oder Theater?* collectively pose a doubled question neither to life or death, nor to love and suffering—Munch's issues. Neither would or could Salomon's work interrogate any of these from the position of an anguished masculinity. From the no-place of feminine and artistic namelessness and what we could justly name the social death inflicted on a Jewish refugee and exile, Charlotte Salomon created not a frieze of life but an urgent philosophical inquiry into why women take their lives as escape from situations within the family home. Her artwork also investigated how, in her own politically threatened and sexually menaced domestic condition, she might choose to deflect the appeal of self-inflicted death by making an artwork to find a name: a choice to live was also a means to *find* a self.

The statement I have placed as an epigraph writes of undertaking this vast work to find a self and thereby a name. The words occur in fact in a painting, or, rather, a word-image object that forms a supplement to *Leben? oder Theater?*. Included in the two packages that were placed in hiding in Nice in February 1943 which contained 1325 paintings of which the redacted *Leben? oder Theater?* (namely the selected, sequenced, numbered whole divided into three parts and prefaced with a title, dedication, memorial and a prefatory pages) was the major part, 30 additional painted pages have been named by scholars as a "Postscript." As a result of the revelation of nineteen pages taken out of from the "Postscript" by

her surviving family, pages of which a transcript was made 1975 that was not made public until 2012, we now surmise that *Leben? oder Theater?* might have originally presented itself as both a love letter to the object of a one-sided passion that concerned life and not sex. It also presents itself as an explanation of why the artist undertook her project, and why it failed to save her from a desperate act: not suicide but attempted murder (Pollock, “Crimes”). The writing in the “Postscript” testifies to the precarious condition of the artist at the time of making her great art work and in the present of writing: in elective solitariness, forced statelessness as a persecuted refugee, psychologically traumatized not only by Nazi fascism in Germany and its military victories in June 1940 in France, where she had found precarious refuge after 1938, but by the recent and brutal account of many suicides in her family revealed to her in March 1940. Shortly thereafter she was a witness to the physical horror of her grandmother’s bloody death when she jumped from a window in their apartment in Nice.

Unlike the long-lived and prolific Edvard Munch, who as an artist is now overshadowed by a biography that has come to obscure his works, reducing them to being only signs of his anguished psyche and tormented desires, Charlotte Salomon felt herself, and indeed was, artistically nameless during her lifetime: her work was never exhibited before 1961. But as in the case of Munch, because of her tragic death and her life of bereavement, biography can easily obscure the *artworking* of Charlotte Salomon, making transparently biographical the paintings crafted materially in one sustained period of intense creative activity between 1941 and 1942 to which she added overlays on transparent paper, writing words directly on the later ones, and ordered them as all of the following: a Brechtian play about love and music, a memorial book of the dead, a book with chapters.

I knew at once when I was invited to speak at the symposium about Edvard Munch and Emma Bovary on the occasion of the exhibition curated by Mieke Bal in 2017 that I would take up what Bal has taught us to read as resonances between artworks without the formal links determined by literary or art historical convention. I felt it would be an occasion to explore the hitherto unrecognized strings resonating between Charlotte Salomon and Edvard Munch that do not imply a simple stylistic inheritance of the Norwegian artist in Charlotte Salomon’s work. Such resonances would operate on two planes: the painterly and the philosophical. The “preposterous” (another of Bal’s gifts to us in cultural analysis and at history) connections between Munch and Salomon are triangulated by an obvious but tricky third party, the German philosopher of the Dionysian, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), whose name is now a signifier for

a radical moment in modern thought about art as much as about subjectivity (Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio* 1–8).

Nietzsche articulated a vision for life as an aesthetic project. Like Walter Benjamin, another key thinker relevant to our understanding of Charlotte Salomon's work as an event in culture, Nietzsche complicates any attempt to separate the poetic, the aesthetic and the philosophical. Both Nietzsche and Benjamin offered to modernist artists who were seeking ways of saying things through painting at the juncture of materiality and allusion, the concepts of the aphoristic and the allegorical. Both are modes of oblique, associational and resonant signification that leave us suspended between the figurative and the enigmatic excess that cannot be confined or identified with narrative and yet enables us to recognize narrativity as a necessary "stage" for the investigation of modern subjectivities. Both Edvard Munch and Charlotte Salomon share the capacity to arrest us at the level of marveling at their use of paint, their surfaces, their gestures, their materialization of vision, place and space, while demanding of us a distancing from such purely painterly pleasures because of a disturbing intensity of affective freight that involves reading figure, space and painted gesture as components of a production of something we might name at once novelistic and cinematic.

Artworks can function as readings of other artworks on many levels. I suggest Salomon's work performs a reading of what was offered to another artist by the existence of Munch's works with their deep sense of aesthetic inquiry into Nietzschean questions. Understanding artworks as readings of what other artworks make possible enables us to avoid biographical fixation while inviting an analysis of aesthetic practice as a *scene of subjectivity*. Using this case study of one of the painterly readers of Munch, namely Charlotte Salomon, who was an artist trying to make sense of the potential offered in a Nietzschean aesthetic by means of Munch's painting, I shall place a feminist and psychoanalytical lens over the question of *the scene of painting*. To do so means admitting to the forces of love, desire, hatred, shame, disgust and fury, but not as individualized or personalized conditions of a single historical personality. They are revealed to us by certain artistic and literary practices as modern affective conditions to which poets, composers and visual artists, and latterly cinema, give varied form in the century between Flaubert's novels and Munch and Charlotte Salomon's paintings. We discover their lineaments and shape through reading these aesthetic forms with our own affectability. Thus, we receive them also as a *scene of subjectivity*.

One of my great debts to Mieke Bal is the understanding of cultural analysis as a method of working with *concepts* (Bal, *Travelling Concepts*).

Concepts are generated in different theoretical and practical domains. By travelling from their originating discourse, they facilitate ways of thinking in different disciplines that thus escape the confines of theoretical orthodoxy or disciplinary dogma. In light of the liberating force of Bal's book *Travelling Concepts*, I came to recognize that my long-evolving project as a feminist cultural analyst and art historian had been the creation of concepts with which to think what was unthought in my discipline, namely the historical and cultural fact of the *co-creation of art by women and men*, which, I would argue, is the specific and distinctive ground of art in the modern period. This involved conceptualizing difference in all its complexity.

The current concept with which I have been working since 2001 is that of the virtual feminist museum (VFM) (Pollock, *Encounters*). The VFM is not a cybernetic platform allowing infinite play with images on the internet. Understood in a philosophical sense, virtuality is the attribute of feminism, *pace* Bergson, Deleuze and Elizabeth Grosz. I thereby pose feminism as still to come. Feminism is to be understood, therefore, as an unrealized virtuality without definition, even while some aspects of its unharvested potentiality have been historically actualized at different moments in varied forms (theology, political rights and votes, peace movements, philosophy, liberation, rights to the body, to desire, to transcend social gender, and so forth). No actualization ever exhausts its virtuality. Feminism cannot be confined to a historical narrative of periods or waves or generations or themes. It is clearly not yet done (Pollock, "Is Feminism a Trauma").

What characterizes virtual feminism's relation to, and its challenging of, the museum and the exhibition as a system of cultural knowledge is its play with non-canonical logics of association. Canonical logic links art by nation, style, descent, period and influence. In part, my VFM models itself on the daring and often opaque conjunctions we find in Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927–29)—in feminist ways at odds, however, with Georges Didi-Huberman's recent interpretations and appropriations (Warburg; Didi-Huberman, *L'Image* and *Atlas*). The VFM is also indebted to the scene of psychoanalysis represented for us by the array of objects and images on the desk of Sigmund Freud. I have long pondered what it means that psychoanalysis was formulated in the presence of so many objects, so many images (Pollock, "The Object's Gaze").

Mieke Bal created an actual installation in the Munch Museum, forging a creative conversation between Edvard (Munch) and Emma (Bovary/Flaubert) by means of a focus on three dimensions discovered in the "figures" of loneliness, looking sideways and the cinematic that she discerned

in both novel and paintings by means of reading Flaubert through her own filmmaking. She thus effected a transformation of the scenes and valences of a great nineteenth century novel and a painter born in the nineteenth century who lived well into the twentieth and who was canonically placed under the flag of modernism, subsections Symbolism and Expressionism. She has set us a challenge, however, by placing a fictional feminine character who bears the title of a new kind of novel to inflect our reading of the masculine artist re-envisioned by the works he created, read sideways by looking *with* Emma Bovary. How to learn from entanglement of literature, visual art and moving image across the networks of masculinity and femininity in the long space of modernity? How did her installation radicalize our thinking about gender and class, subjectivity and aesthetic practice through curation as a medium?

By means of powerpoint in the lecture presentation at the symposium I was able to curate an installation in my virtual feminist museum introducing Edvard Munch to Charlotte Salomon and vice-versa alongside some intermediating others such as Van Gogh. Such a visual display is not possible in the context of this publication. The point of my virtual exhibition was to challenge formal art historical logics of descent and influence, while being allowed some space to bring together Salomon and Munch under a recognizable art historical analysis of what artworks do. We know that Charlotte Salomon, a German Jewish artist coming of age as an artist between 1936 and 1942, had reason to be aware of images by Edvard Munch, widely exhibited and written about in Germany, but also because his work belonged to a community of modernists collectively denounced by her nation's fascist regime in the same terms—*Entartung, degeneracy*—as her very existence, as a Jewish person, was being put at risk by that regime. Indeed the conflation between Jewishness and modernism in the art ideologies of Nazi Germany made any solidarity with modernism on the part of a Jewish artist such as Charlotte Salomon a declaration of both aesthetic fidelity and political resistance.

But this is a thin reason to add Charlotte Salomon to our deliberations about Munch. I have been working on Charlotte Salomon since 1994 and since 2001 composing a book on Salomon's single work of 1942–42. It is finally resolved and will appear in 2017 (Pollock, *Charlotte Salomon in the Theatre of Memory*). But it is not by chance that the Munch-Salomon connection has become interesting to me, and more so, in the light of what Ernst van Alphen opened up for the study of Salomon, and Mieke Bal for the approach to Munch. Bal's exhibition is a revelation of further possibilities. At once I see resonances around dissonant social gatherings, uncanny weddings, and women who die pre-

maturely, or, it seems, of an affliction that marriage cannot save. Had I the space (and the opportunity) I would like to curate four rooms. These would encircle a painting by Charlotte Salomon, the final image of her great work, showing a woman alone on the beach (fig. 1) with Munch's *Melancholy*, *Inger on the Beach* and *Young Girl on a Jetty* (fig. 2). The grouping would resonate and at the same time point up the difference, for CS's woman is on the seashore *painting*. Neither a sister, nor object of desire, nor subject of despair, this artist is shown, in the painting she placed at the work's conclusion, actually making the first stroke to begin her great project. Another "room" would include Munch's *Madonna*, *Vampire*, *The Kiss* with two works by Charlotte Salomon: a painting dreaming man and his vision of his "Madonna" (fig. 3 and 4). It would also include her painting of *Jealousy* (fig. 5). A third combination would be centred on CS's figure of a young woman seated on her bed with hands to her mouth. Around her head are written her thoughts: "I have had enough of these times." This appears in another version in a different colour scheme and invites the companionship of Munch's frozen naked adolescent, seated alone on a bed, protecting her young body behind which a dark shadow looms that logically is her cast shadow but which takes on its own menacing force of fear or otherness. The visual combinations assert difference yet solicit comparison as much because of how the scenes are painted as because of connections to the spaces of fantasy as much as the home.

What I am offering is not a thematic conversation, although issues of alienation, desire and fantasy are clearly part of what I am suggesting. The mini-exhibition is about the possibility of painting in such different registers that leave the viewer suspended between what we might read as an event and the image that suggests we are looking at a memory or a fantasy. Paint has to be freed in ways that I see in Munch and Salomon, differently. What makes the painterly forms and daring of Salomon possible is, I am proposing, something we now see in Munch. The existence of Munch's paintings, I could equally argue, makes some aspects of Charlotte Salomon legible to us now. As a result of the exhibition *Emma & Edvard*, and thus having seen more works by Munch together in the selections and configurations Bal has made in her curation, the connecting links between Munch and Salomon, I argue, circle around a painterly energy (hers in gouache, his in thinned oil paint) and an intensity of colour that is always seeking to make forms emerge, that is to *formulate*, while the very gestures and pleasures and intensities of applying paint undo the containment promised by form. The laying in of paint generates force fields of colour and hence of affective energy.

Psychoanalytically speaking, this non-dialectic dialectic—the will to form as it were and the impossibility of allowing its realization because the will must remain visible as a drive or pleasure in itself—inscribes into Munch’s paintings the Dionysian as at once ecstatic and depressive, lively and deadly (Aby Warburg’s brilliant insight) that is both present in Salomon’s work, where we see formalization resisted or deflected by a deeper pleasure in the manipulation of paint itself (Agamben 97) (fig. 6). But to be more prosaically art historical, it was by encountering Munch’s commissioned but posthumous portrait of Nietzsche of 1905 (fig. 7) that I first felt I had seen in art something that made intelligible some of the painterly processes and vocabularies with which Charlotte Salomon played at different points in her single work (Stawser II).

I have never been drawn to study the work of Edvard Munch. I never wanted to study Nietzsche. Yet here I am writing about both via a strange footnote to these cultural giants in the form of a single if massive artwork by a woman who was killed aged 26 in October 1943, the year after Edvard Munch turned 80, dying just three months later on 23 January 1944. Perhaps I was put off by the dominant narratives around Munch as a suffering genius that were at once reductively psychobiographical and celebratory, proposing as prototypically modernist and intimate relation between art, masculinity and a culturally interesting form of mental suffering. One of my earliest texts, published in 1980, attacked the mythology of the prototypical anguished genius, Van Gogh (Pollock, “Artists, Mythologies and Media”). I addressed this critique to the discursive formation that was art history, and in so doing, identified art history as a discourse that produced specific, ideological effects. In its preferred forms—the monograph and the catalogue raisonné, and we could extend that to museums dedicated to one artist—art history as discourse performatively produces the *artistic subject for works of art* as its key *ideological effect*:

The core, against which all attempts to investigate modes and systems of representation and historical conditions of production break is the monograph and catalogue raisonné, and the one-person show. There is more to this than collecting the diverse fragments in order to unite them under the name of a designated author . . . The preoccupation with an individual artist is symptomatic of the work accomplished by art history—namely *the production of an artistic subject for works of art*. (Pollock, “Artists, Mythologies and Media” 58)

The common sense view is that there must be an artist first who makes art. But there is art without this fiction of the singular creative individual

maker. It is the work of art history as a discipline to produce a subject (in the grammatical and psychoanalytical senses) for art—so that art becomes the circular index of its creative author. This has blocked the more extended analysis of the historical, social, psychoanalytical, material and phantasmatic dimensions of artistic practice and of the meanings produced and inscribed as representation. It is also the blockage in terms of gender inclusivity in art history. Woman is not a candidate for this neutral, universal, transcendent subject of creative activity:

This subject is then construed as the exclusive source of meaning, i.e. of art, which removes art from historical and textual analysis by positing it only as the sign of a creative personality . . . The methodology combines the biographical study of the artist with the narrative analysis of the work which thus supports the mutual imbrication of life line and work line. (Pollock, “Artists, Mythologies and Media” 58–59)

This mutual creation of artist and *oeuvre*, then, functions as the cornerstone for the dominant art historical narrative and its masculinization of art that expands to embrace movement, style, period and nation. Or, in reverse, it works down from nation to period to style to *oeuvre* and master. In effect only those who, as “subjects,” might be claimed as representatives of the nation as it was being formulated during the nineteenth century are selected for this function which is, in addition, a mirroring and confirmation of the narcissistic and idealizing subject positions of those who create, iterate and defend this discourse. Art history thus formulated, therefore, cannot but structurally reproduce a history that is white, Christian, heteronormative and masculine. Thus the discourse is problematic for those wishing to propose a social, semiotic, cultural, queer or feminist reading of visual and other representations as productive of meanings not tied to the concept of the originating author. It also militates against the idea that art is the expression of an ideologically sustained version of psychological subjectivity.

Yet of course, in the process of thinking about issues of gender and specifically in the condition of modernity from which we suppose new cultural forms emerged to register its transformations, we will inevitably have to consider issues of both agency and subjectivity, since these are some of the key grounds for new explorations of the impact of capitalist, urban, colonizing modernity. They were aesthetically articulated specifically by those self-fashionings, modes of living and aesthetic practices that have been filed away by canonical modernist art history because of their problematic divergence from the preferred formalist interpretations of the story of modern art. I am talking of Symbolism, late Romanticism and

narrative exploration in art. In the field of queer studies, I need to acknowledge the influence of the Spanish art historian Manuel Segade who developed a different methodology by tracing the manifestations of the myth and psychic condition of Narcissus at the turn of the century in Europe to track what he called the aesthetic formulations of masculine subjectivities that were illegible in the heroic story of mainstream modernism (*Narciso Fin del Siglo*). So, paradoxically, in order to resist reductive psycho-biography while acknowledging the cultural and historical dimension of the narrative of the self on trial in modernity, I shall have to begin with the analysis of the self-portrait.

The first *Self-Portrait* painted by Edvard Munch is dated 1881–82. It has all the hallmarks of an early, student work. A certain sternness and lack of expression is registered. The effect of wariness records the oddity of taking oneself as the object of analysis. The face is that part of ourselves we do not normally see. To watch oneself in a mirror, rather than catching a glimpse when checking our appearance, produces an alienating effect on the one hand, and a certain aggressiveness on the other. Is that me? Who is looking at me? In the self-portrait, the object of the gaze must offer itself to be looked at, making itself receptive and passive before a gaze not identical to him or her being painted in an intimacy this exercise exposes and disrupts. Painting oneself, an interrogative gaze attends to a face as if it were an apple or a jug (Chun 94–126).

Yet we, viewers and art historians, continuously read self-portraits as forms of disclosure and self-inscription. We anticipate a subjectivity displayed against the grain of the abdicated self visually interrogating its object in order to paint it. What we see here is the produced imaging of a young man of a certain age, holding himself still and blank while the eye shifts to study the dramatic configuration of light and dark, and the challenge of realizing it in paint, based on a classic mode using underpainting and chiaroscuro to build its form. An exercise in basic skills in oil paint, the work nonetheless prompts me to place it in a conversation with another event of 1881–82, namely the treatment of a young Viennese Jewish woman Berthe Pappenheim (1859–1936) by Dr Josef Breuer. The text written by Breuer to present a case study of hysteria was an initiating narrative in the discourse that his young colleague, Sigmund Freud, would name psychoanalysis: the talking cure as it was in fact named by Bertha Pappenheim, who invented the term (Breuer and Freud). The specific characteristics of the subsequent case studies of hysteria by Freud blended together hitherto distinct genres of writing (scientific treatise/fiction) in the attempt to create a form of writing for the new, non-Romantic narrative of subjectivity as psyche. According to Freud's discovery, subjectivity is split, divided

against its sense of self not by objective versus subjective difference, by what the ego cannot know, namely what actually determines what it does and feels and fantasizes: the unconscious. “Who am I?” ceases to be a question of identity. It is ontological and unanswerable—hence perhaps the need to paint the self over and over again. Deforming the scientific model of dispassionate observation while appropriating the novelistic language of fiction to create a new kind of portraiture of the new understanding of subjectivity, embedded in a nexus of complex intersubjective relations, psychoanalytical discourse was itself a symptom of a historical formation and its most reflexive mirror. Foucault’s interpretation of psychoanalysis as the institution necessitated by the bourgeois regime of sexuality identified the core tension between the family as site of the social formation of the subject and the analytical consulting room as the space of removal from the family that the family made necessary, a space to escape the family, a space of forced isolation, where the subject is extracted from the web of relations to become, via accompanied time-travel into memory and anamnesis, a co-analyst of the self in a curiously non-dialogical exchange with an analyst who functions as the impassive, silent, mirroring surface: the Other and the avatar of all one’s others.

In the proto-psychoanalytical space of his meetings with Berthe Pappenheim during the early 1880s, just as Munch made his first self-portraits, Breuer incited his patient to speak, to “rattle off” her memories which took the form, however, of scenarios, each burdened with some degree of displaced anxiety and affect, until pursuing each one to its preceding screen as it were, the originating scene of the trauma was finally uncovered. Repetition, displacement and sequence characterized the process of revealing the layered texture of each subjectivity, its historical formation, its historical formation in scenarios that, in the treatment, can only be told as stories. Narrativity and the cinematic co-emerge and undo each other.

One of the late self-portraits of the elderly Edvard Munch, titled *Self-Portrait between the Clock and the Bed* is dated 1940 and 1943 (fig. 8). That means it was being made between the moment CS began her first self-portrait, which is widely used on many book covers to stand for the artist, and when she painted this vision of her avatar with her painted fiction, the character *Charlotte Kann* (fig. 5). In *Leben? oder Theater?* Charlotte Salomon gave Brechtian names to the figures she painted who stood for but were not identical to historical members of her family and its social circle. *Charlotte Kann* appears as a child, an art student and a painter. This painting shows her in a moment of self-interrogation within a love triangle. The painted figure is reflecting what the painted text accompanying the image writes in an impersonal third person: is she jealous?

Munch's *Self-Portrait between the Clock and the Bed* (1940–43) which we now know almost too well, held a fascination for American painter Jasper Johns (b. 1930) who borrowed the pattern of the bedspread for several paintings which shared the title. There has been an exhibition on this topic at the Munch Museum a few months ago (Garells et al.). I learned of the connection through a lecture in the 1990s by my former colleague, Fred Orton, a specialist in the work of Jasper Johns who specifically wanted to formulate a method of reading works by artists such as Johns in terms of the political pressure to veil and displace inscriptions of queer desire during the 1950s in the United States (Orton, *Figuring Jasper Johns*). Avoiding psychologistic interpretation, Orton sought to “see” the material processes of Johns’s painting practice as the only possible form in which a sexual subjectivity, a sexual and affective mode of existence and desire marginalized and oppressed in right-wing homophobic McCarthy’s and Eisenhower’s America, could be impressed into the field of signs. When asked about the relation between his work and Munch, Johns deflected the art historian searching for answers by indicating what interested him, which was objects and their relations, and activities associated with objects: “cutting, measuring, mixing, blending, consuming—creation and destruction moderated by ritualised manners” (Kennedy).

This is in fact a rather psychoanalytical answer precisely in the attention to the pleasures or emotions experienced in gestures; formalized gestures, social gestures, mediated by displacement of the figures of those social gestures onto the agency of objects. Might we then call that activity fetishism, in its original sense: a belief in the potency of what is not human to affect the human? This flips us back to the fetishism of the commodity, the effacement of the human within the exchanges that include the person in the capitalist system so perfectly given an enigmatically emptied visual form through Edouard Manet’s painting *Bar at the Folies Bergère* (London: Courtauld Institute Gallery), painted in 1881 and exhibited in 1882, the period of Munch’s first self-inscriptions, and which is clearly in Munch’s mind as he makes this painting and in Johns’s as he makes that comment.

In the *Self-Portrait between the Clock and the Bed* the elderly man is positioned in space, frontally and full length. A clock is without hands and thus only a face towers over him, forming a powerful dark vertical form to his right. I refuse to endow it with the meaning of a coffin. The axis is wrong. The opposing side of the painting uses an object—the bed—an object that marks the deadly horizontal axis in the painting while its bedspread bearing a design in red and black both produces the flat plane of the bed and begins to undo such volume and flatten itself in alignment with the surface of the painting. Behind the man, painted in ochre and

Naples yellow is the indication of a back wall, broken up with painted versions of paintings, themselves imagined as flat against the wall. This mini-exhibition is dominated by a faceless figure in red: red so often associated with a female figure amongst others. Then this space is opened, no doubt in honour of Velázquez (*Las Meninas*, 1656, Madrid Museo Nacional del Prado) by means of introducing an open door breaching the flat back wall of the painting to project the space from which someone enters the space of the painting from deep beyond. Shielded but not obscured by the door, a full-length female nude is painted as the upright form overseeing, overlooking the bed. She adds a twist, a third figure on the vertical, when nude women are in the conventions of art history usually horizontal. When they are not, they are called fatal women.

Description as Bal has taught us invites us to travel around a work, naming what has been placed on the canvas, noticing that nothing is without significance because it is there, part of the semiotic whole that is the painted object demanding our work in reading the signs. So, what has description engendered on the journey around this painting? A sense of how it is structured, how opposition is crucial to its dynamic, how betweenness is made visible as a result. But also, it is asking about the figure in space, in a space that contains images, that has a point of entry and of exit. Yet, the presence of a bed introduces another set of terms, consciousness and unconsciousness, clothed and naked, the bed as the locus of sleep but also sex, disappointment, loneliness and death. If we rush to the concept of sex and death by means of the symbolic signifier, the clock, we must ask: where are its hands ticking away time, setting the schedule for mortality? It has no hands. The bed is covered, its night-time functions overlaid with this striking reference to pattern, to a system of signs more ancient than the modes of oil painting and its capacity for naturalizing figuration.

In one sense, there are four figures in this work, each with a different status: the clock is a figure of uprightness and it too has a face and a body, but no legs. The standing man is clearly a figure with a face whose features are both in the process of forming and of dissolving. The body is held in an expressively gestureless posture and threatens to turn into an object within this room of objects while retaining its difference to highlight its subjective anguish. There is a portrayed figure in the frame of the painting at the back without facial specification and then there is a nude woman, pale like a ghost, hands behind her back, almost walking forward, in terms of the pose, head to one side.

In an earlier reading of Charlotte Salomon and Van Gogh, I have argued that the former shows herself to be creative interpreter Van Gogh's use of space as a sign of subjective emplacement. As a retrospective, if

not preposterous, reading of Van Gogh, Salomon's work reveals a dimension that we might not appreciate without our recognition of her work as such a reading of Van Gogh's legacy. I suggest that, *a posteriori*, her "Van Gogh" gave her permission for a radical play with personally invested, narrative, subjectivizing *space* in painting (Pollock, "Mapping the 'Bios'"). Van Gogh's position *vis-à-vis* modernism's more rigorous and anti-romantic engagement with pictorial structure is eccentric. Fred Orton and I have pointed to Van Gogh's almost phenomenological use of lived, experienced space to fashion a kind of pictorial space that supports an exploration of subjectivity (*Vincent van Gogh: Artist of His Time*). It is precisely Van Gogh's eccentric position *vis-à-vis* modernism's more rigorous and anti-romantic engagement with pictorial structure that held open a space for a nonetheless modernist exploration of subjectivity—not in terms of the expressionist stylization of extremity typical of the German followers of Van Gogh—but by means of the production of narrative pictorial space to hold oblique inscriptions of subjectivity.

That an artist, CS, whom we otherwise find hard to locate in art history, could appropriate as a possible position for her own creative defiance not only the inventiveness of Van Gogh's psychologization of space, but also the tenacious restaging of remembered places figured through an untrained but intuitively creative freedom with colour and drawing, helps us create different questions to ask of modernist painting and to map out different pathways through its many possibilities. The affiliation affirmed by Charlotte Salomon has the effect of making visible to us now that spaces of memory and notably of the everyday were core elements of *his oeuvre*.² To flowers and boots as signs of Van Goghness that she invokes in a painting that declares her artistic allegiances (JHM 4351), we can add the painting of one's home and its interiors, as well as intimate spaces like the bedroom. Is it too wild a suggestion to see as indirect support for CS's paintings of scenes such as a child's bedroom Van Gogh's painting of his Arles bedroom (*Bedroom in the Yellow House*, 1888, oil on canvas, 73.6 x 92.3 cm, Chicago Art Institute)? One tiny scene in a painting in the Prologue takes us back to a "Berlin Childhood" (Walter Benjamin's title) and the moment of the reporting of the death/suicide of the child's mother. There, in faded and almost dissipating pallor, sits a child on a bed (*Leben? oder Theater?* JHM 4180).

² On Van Gogh's unconventional pictorial space and his attachment to place see my forthcoming *Reading Van Gogh: Memories of Place and Space* (London: Thames and Hudson).

Finally, I want to bring us back to Munch, Salomon and Nietzsche, by means of CS's trip to Venice. From the vantage point of France in 1941, Salomon painted a childhood visit made during the 1920s to the lagoon city which was not a painting of purely biographical memory. It served also as a statement of artistic identity. Venice was a city of significance to Friedrich Nietzsche who not only lived there, but wrote a major poem *Venedig*. Salomon quotes lines from his other Venice poem *Mein Glück*:

Lass erst die Schatten dunkeln
Und wachsen bis zur braunen lauen Nacht!

Let now the shadows darken
And grow into a mellow, brown night! (my translation)

This is Salomon's memory version: "Und warte nur—lass erst die Schatten dunkeln vorüber bis zur lauen, braunen Nacht," misquoted on the transparency that annotates a full page painting of the grandparents, the father and the beloved governess Hase as they stand awestruck before Basilica of San Marco (JHM 4199). As in Nietzsche's poem, the scene is set in early evening, with slightly darkening but intense blue sky while lighted gondolas bob on the Grand Canal in ways that evoke a second Nietzsche poem, "Venedig," which refers specifically to Gondolas, Light and Music.

Did the ten year-old Charlotte Salomon herself already know either of Nietzsche's "Venice" or his poetry? I would argue that the Nietzschean overlay evokes perhaps what she might have come to know of her dead mother's fascination with this philosopher, evidenced in an excluded image, thus forging a link. But more importantly, it is part of the dialogue with a character CS names *Amadeus Daberlohn*, who models himself on the prophetic figure of Nietzsche, and whose musical philosophy so oft repeated: "Learn to sing O my soul" is a mangling of the poet's famous lines from "Venedig"/"Venice":

An der Brücke stand
Jüngst ich in brauner Nacht.
Fernher kam Gesang:
Goldener Tropfen quoll's
Über die zitternde Fläche weg.
Gondeln, Lichter, Musik—
Trunken schwamm's in die Dämmerung hinaus . . .
Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel,

Sang sich, unsichtbar berührt,
 Heimlich ein Gondellied dazu,
 Zitternd vor bunter Seligkeit.
 Hörte jemand ihr zu?

At the bridge
 Recently I stood in brown night.
 From far away came singing;
 Of golden drops it welled
 Away over the trembling surface.
 Gondolas, lights, music—
 Drunken it floated out into the dusk.

My soul, a lyre,
 Sang to itself, invisibly touched,
 secretly a gondola song,
 trembling with coloured bliss.
 Was anyone listening to it? (Lösel: 60)

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Here the disquiet of a creative and lonely man confronted with the problem of isolation seems to be the necessary condition of creativity. In the personal sphere his craving for friends is movingly expressed in his letters which betray his estrangement from fellow-men and searching for communication. In his poetry he appears solitary. One of this most stately poems, which shows utter alienation from the world, bears the legend: "Lonely." The motif of loneliness appears in most of Nietzsche's poems. The soul and not the conscious self sings, inspired by what Nietzsche terms the Dionysian, the intoxicating principle of boundless but sensitized living which stands in as the dynamic and necessary other to the lucid world of the rational Apollo.

The Venice introduced pictorially by Charlotte Salomon as memory into the artist's childhood formation is thus the Venice imagined by Nietzsche, Wagner, Mahler and Mann. But the quality it introduces is loneliness . . . perhaps that which most drew certain men like Munch to Nietzsche in his articulation of a passionate sense of life and the desolation of non-connection. Yet there is the final turn from the loneliness for the isolated, persecuted young woman created what I name her theatre of memory through the movement of her brush and liquid of gouache on paper, a turn through a tortured and remembered love which took the form of a passionate immersion in a contradictory philosophy of choosing life by having dared to encounter death—a social death of a stateless refugee and camp inmate and the imaginative encounters with the dead through painting the journeys of three women to suicide.

This takes us to the heart of Charlotte Salomon's philosophical project that required over 400 paintings to elaborate through the invocation and performance of a character called *Amadeus Daberlohn* who was the conduit for the Nietzschean aesthetic suspended between musical joy and the experience of solitude and almost-death. At second hand, rehearsing borrowed words preached at her in the face of her seeming indifference, Charlotte Salomon painting as CS had also to find a visual mode for her aesthetic work. What has been named Dionysian painting, painting in her case sung to music, painting created with a singing soul, opens the space of painting to subjectivity that is not the expression of a single harrowed biographical subject, but a condition filtered through her singular re-inscription of the resources offered by artists and poets across a shared text we might name the modern.

The Nietzschean link serves as a strange and uncertain bridge between two artists, Edvard Munch and Charlotte Salomon. Their relation lies in the manner by which painting itself conveys its own philosophical underpinnings that make possible an inquiry into conditions of loneliness and exile from the world in different forms, genders, locations and histories. Where would Charlotte Salomon have found something like this? Or perhaps that is the typical art historian's question. It is not that she found it or had to find anything. It is that *I see* something resonant when I put her paintings in conversation with those of Munch that enables me to attend to the psychologically dense materiality of both of these artists and the energy with which paint is applied to a surface so as to become a work that renders the *scene of painting* the *scene of subjectivity* while holding in suspension those other questions of gender, sexuality, religious difference and age.

Her figuration of the musician and poet *Amadeus Daberlohn* represents for Salomon the survivor-victim of the great trauma of the early twentieth century, the Great War as they named the First World War. That was the event that Walter Benjamin thought had changed the conditions of subjectivity because it changed the conditions of narrative itself. History had made storytelling no longer possible. In his essay "The Storyteller" Benjamin wrote: "A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body" (Benjamin 84). But the other force that undid the tradition of the story was, according to Benjamin, the rise of the novel, engendered by the printing press that transposed the oral story into the written book. The story, Benjamin argues, carries experience, one's own or others' into a shared form of learned wisdom

quite different from the novel. The novel carries “the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life’s fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living” (Benjamin 84). He specifically references the German form of the *Bildungsroman* (Thomas Mann on his mind?) which might also convey a story of experience. But he argues: “By integrating the social process with the development of a person, it bestows the most frangible justification on the order determining it. The legitimacy it provides stands in direct opposition to reality. Particularly in the *Bildungsroman*, it is this inadequacy that is actualized” (Benjamin 88).

These thoughts of Walter Benjamin resonate here with those of a close friend in exile in France during the 1930s, Hannah Arendt. In her final but unfinished project, three volumes on thinking, *The Life of the Mind* (1981) Arendt argued that storytelling was a vital dimension for any form of self-recognition, what she defined as being a who and not a what, who-ness only occurring in a relay with a life being told and being heard back from such a telling, mediated often by another or the otherness of one’s own created form, perhaps. Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero extends Arendt’s critique of the limits of philosophical and political thought by adding the notion of narration as integral to the recognition of this singularity in plurality. Storytelling thus becomes a new kind of political scene. In glossing Cavarero’s reading of the politicizing process involved in women telling stories in consciousness-raising groups that shaped the early Women’s Movement as an example, her translator, Paul A. Kottman explains:

What makes narration a political act is not simply that this narration involves the struggle of a collective subjectivity, but rather than it makes clear the *fragility of the unique*. The uniqueness and the unity of a self, which is disclosed through that self’s actions and words, and which is then narrated as a unique and unified life-story, does not display any of the general characteristics of traditional subjectivity: interiority, psychology, agency, self-presence, mastery and so forth. Rather the “narratable self” is a unique *existent*, “who” someone is. (Kottman x; emphasis added)

Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Cavarero argues that human singularity involves recognizing ourselves as narratable selves, which paradoxically involves receiving back our story through the mediation of an Other (Cavarero 20–21).

I want to suggest, therefore, that artists who have been positioned by scholars in the mode of bleeding into paint, expressing their suffering by depositing their psyches on the canvas or paper are not at all involved in such uni-directional activity. The very question of subjectivity itself is

posed by staging the failure of narrative connection in the spaces of painting that propose and disrupt intersubjective relay. In the case of artists, the action with which I began, the alienating of the self into the seen that can then look back from the other space of the canvas becomes a theatre of subjectivity because it is scene of painting.

What makes Charlotte Salomon's work modern is not the apparent ease with which her paintings can be made into *mise-en-scène* for realist drama and cinematic representation—which has unfortunately been too often the case with films, operas and novels. It is that she grasped what the cinematic was doing in relation to the tensions between telling and showing *in painting*. As an artist coming of age at the point of transition from musically accompanied to synchronized sound and colour cinema that would make possible a new form, the musical, she was already immersed in a precinematic form of painting, culled from Expressionism and Symbolism: a form of painting pressing at the limits of the single frame, and seeking the serial as a combination of formal, painterly gesture and narrative space. Munch's *Frieze of Life* paintings have theatrical qualities. Bal argues many are also cinematic. Munch also painted settings in which figures were positioned in dramatic and disturbed relations to each other and to events about which they did not communicate. Death has happened or desire is being incited and denied.

Charlotte Salomon becomes the name of a reader of both the potentialities of the cinematic and the specificities of a Nietzschean imaginary where vitality is registered in flows of painting and painterly lines that nonetheless fix and hold the isolated subjects in their formal, ritualized gestures of unfulfilled exchange. Emotion or, rather, affect as a force that breaches and undoes the boundary of the imagined Apollonian self spreads into certain flows of colour that do not articulate the forms beneath their imaginary surfaces. This is why when I saw Munch's *Portrait of Nietzsche*, I could recognize the possibility of CS as a painter. I saw also the way in which a later artist's work could perform a reading through which a way of seeing what was being unknowingly read itself emerged into a form of intelligibility that required us to create the spaces of exchange, the possibility of preposterous understanding as *Emma & Edvard* enabled a staging of Charlotte Salomon and Edvard Munch.

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Fig. 1. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *The Final Painting: CS Beginning to Paint* (painting no. 558, JHM 4925). *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam.



Fig. 2. Edvard Munch, *Young Girl on a Jetty*, 1896, coloured etching and scraped aquatint, 219 x 288 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo.

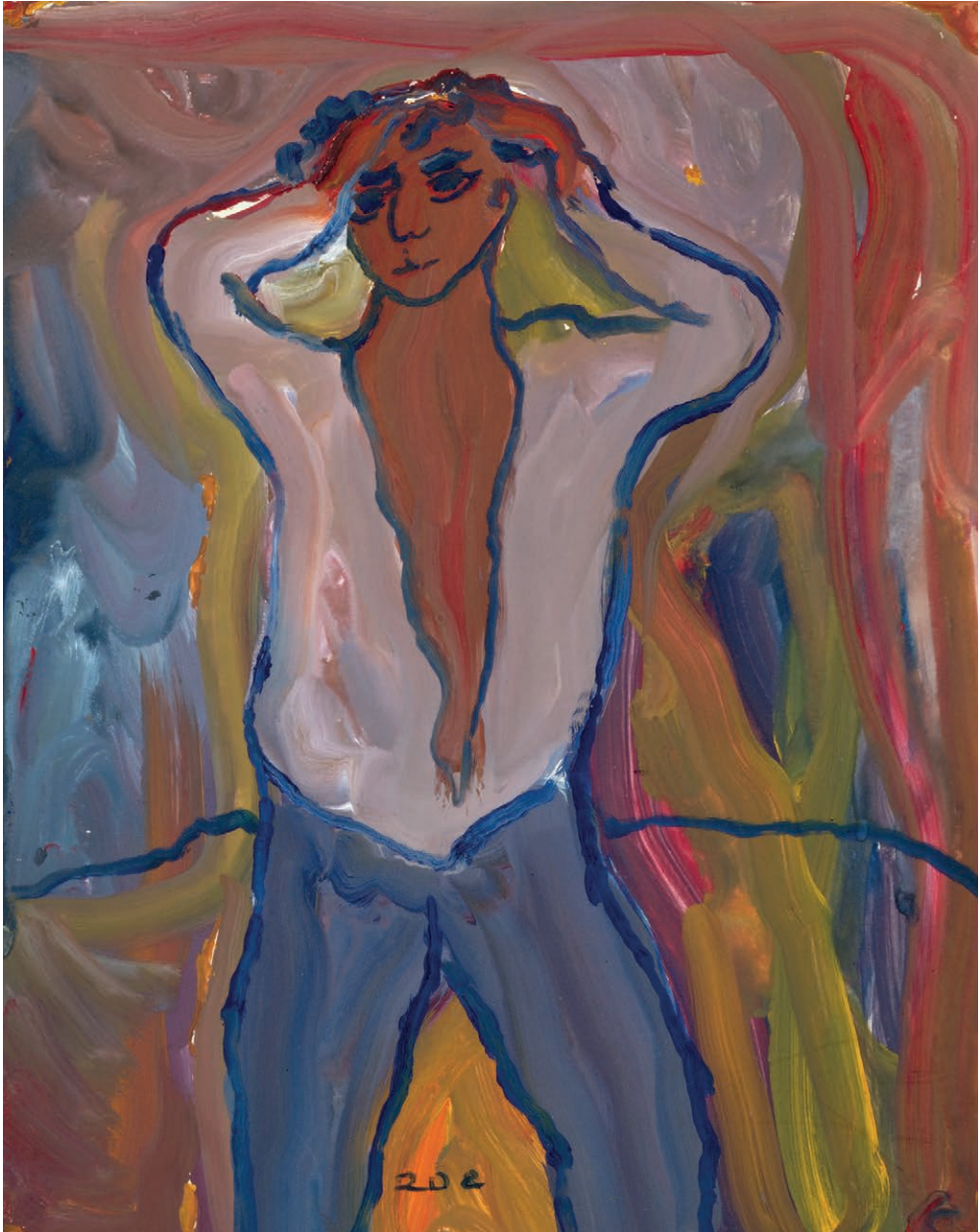


Fig. 3. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *Amadeus Daberlohn after Listening to Paulinka Bimbam Singing Gluck* (main part painting, no. 208, JHM 4587), *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam. The overlay says: “The blood courses hotly through his veins.”

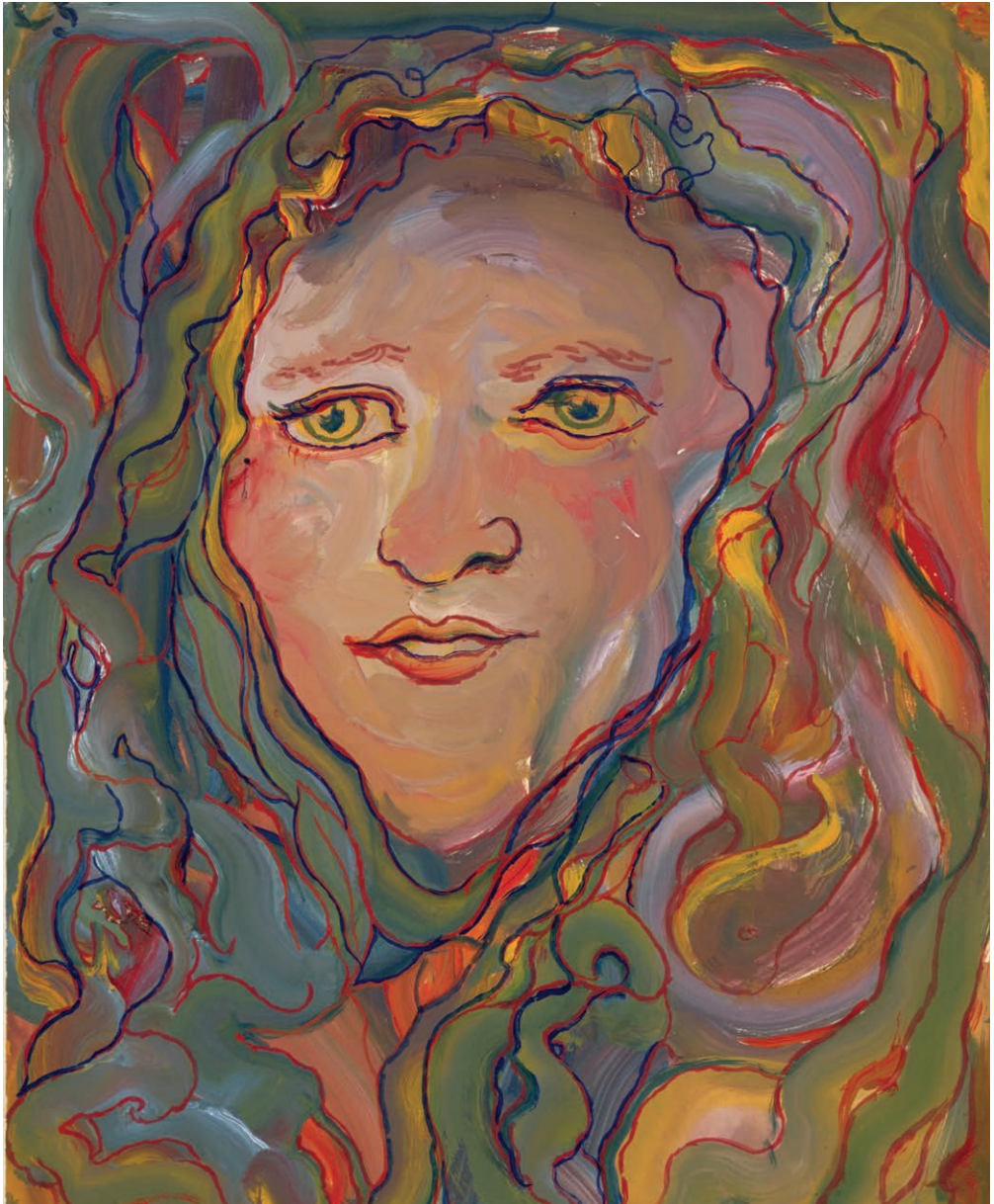


Fig. 4. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *Amadeus Daberlohn Has a Vision of Paulinka Bimbam while Having a Mask Made of His Face* (painting no. 212, not numbered, JHM 4591), *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam. The overlay says: “While his face is being worked on, the following is taking place in his mind: the vision dominating his senses blends colour and music: out of a confusion of swirling lines a theatrical mask of Paulinka takes shape.”



Fig. 5. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *Jealous Charlotte* (main part painting, no. 261, JHM 4639), *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam. The overlay says: “Charlotte is not sure of her emotions. Is it jealousy or something else growing within her where her love is concerned?”



Fig. 6. CS [Charlotte Salomon], *The Night Struggle* (epilogue painting, no. 506, JHM 4884), *Leben? oder Theater?*, 1941–42, gouache on paper, 25 x 32.5 cm. Jewish Historical Museum/Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Amsterdam.



Fig. 7. Edvard Munch, *Portrait of German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche*, 1906, oil on canvas, 201 x 160 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo.



Fig. 8. Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait between the Clock and the Bed*, 1940–43, oil on canvas, 120.5 x 149.5 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo.

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Responding to *Modern Sensibilities*:
Emma and Edvard Entangled

ABSTRACT

This article is an edited version of the response paper offered at the conclusion of the symposium, *Modern Sensibilities*. It ties together themes from the symposium papers, as well as ideas prompted by Mieke Bal's exhibition, *Emma & Edvard: Love in the Time of Loneliness*, and her accompanying book, *Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*. It focuses on the anachronistic entanglements among Flaubert's "Emma," Munch's motifs, Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker's *Madame B*, the Munch Museum's architecture and exhibition scenography, and the exhibition viewer.

Keywords: Munch, Bovary, desire, entanglement.

It is an honour to respond to the *Modern Sensibilities* conference, and at its centre, Mieke Bal's book, *Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways: Loneliness and the Cinematic*, her exhibition, *Emma & Edvard: Love in the Time of Loneliness*, and her collaborative multi-channel video work, *Madame B* (2014). I move back and forth among the installation, the book and the lectures in this response. Mieke Bal made for us, as in the words of Miguel Ángel Hernández Navarro, "a new object." Juxtaposing works by Edvard Munch with video screens displaying *Madame B*, still images from the video, parabolic speakers and storyboards, while intermingling the visual, auditory and literary, the exhibition is manifestly interdisciplinary as Bal reminded us *inter alia*, quoting Roland Barthes:

it begins effectively . . . when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down . . . in the interests of a new object and a new language neither of which has a place in the field of the sciences that are to be brought peacefully together, this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation. (155)

Bal used the phrase "the space between" in her introductory lecture as a way of charactering the interdisciplinarity of her exhibition, and I want to tease out some of the resonances of that space by calling attention to three of the critical avenues that she offered through the exhibition, the accompanying book and the selection of this group of papers: first, the concept of entanglement; second, the theme of desire; and third, the problems of mobility and formlessness, sight and erasure, and suturing and montage that constitute the cinematic.

The exhibition *Emma & Edvard: Love in the Time of Loneliness* (created with the assistance of curator Ute Kuhleemann Falck) followed a sequence of exhibitions held at the Munch Museum collectively entitled "+ Munch": *Melgaard + Munch*, *Van Gogh + Munch*, *Vigeland + Munch*, *Mapplethorpe + Munch*, *Jasper Johns + Munch*, *Jorn + Munch*. In this series from 2015–2016, Munch's works were paired with those of other artists to demonstrate a parallelism in careers, a direct influence or contemporaneous mutual influences. Bal's exhibition and its related book are fundamentally different in their pairing of Munch with Emma Bovary, who is 1) a woman, 2) a fictional woman, and 3) a woman not of his time.

In so doing, Bal opened a space for "associative connections" through the activity of the visitor who moved between static and time-based art, and among a dense web of intertextual figures. Bal also installed the exhibition according to a series of themes, interrupting art-historical linearity in what Griselda Pollock termed "a non-canonical logic of association."

In so doing, Bal also staged Munch's work as, to use Pollock's word, "biographyless." This is to say that Bal decoupled Munch's motifs from any references to his own lived experience, a troubling and tantalizing idea in relation to Munch, whose work is often essentialized through the details of his biography (Berman 1284–89). Similarly, the multi-channel video installations decoupled Emma from Flaubert's narrative through a series of "reverse quotations" (references to texts, images, and material culture from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) and by virtue of its emphasis on the physical and thematic gaps between the screens (fig. 1).

In her conceptualization of the exhibition and in her video installation *Madame B*, her collaborative interpretation of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) with Michelle Williams Gamaker, Bal literally staged anachronism. She asked us to consider how the present animated the past and made it meaningful and useable for the contemporary moment. One of the introductory wall texts read: "Flaubert imagined it. Munch depicted it. What is our role in it?" Two actors—Emma and Edvard—comingled across time with us, the viewing public. In so doing, their images and identities both shaped and were filtered through our particular associations and moments of viewing. Munch was born in 1863 and died in 1944; Emma was "born" as the serialized novel *Madame Bovary* in 1856 by the hand of Gustave Flaubert, who was himself born in 1821 and died in 1880, at approximately the same time that Munch endeavoured to become an artist. We viewed the exhibition in winter 2017.

The troubling of chronology and the richness of heterochrony was the subject of Miguel Ángel Hernández Navarro's talk. He characterized the encounter of figures from different temporalities as mutually transformative, as "alternatives to the monochronic regime of modernity [that] release the different tenses of experience, in which present pasts, memory, and differing continuities allow for a consideration of the so-called modern sensibility." He identified the exhibition as a "temporal space" in which "tenses [were] confused" and the discursive habits of viewing were interrupted. In his formulation, the kind of encounter within the exhibition as a "dialogue" among the manifest subjects and ourselves as subjects who constituted meaning. The heterochrony of actors offered, in Navarro's words, "a new thing," whose ruptures in time, glitches and breaks were central features of modernity. Invoking Georges Didi-Huberman's notion of montage, of "the art of producing this form that thinks" (120), Navarro emphasized the foundations of Bal's project to bring together resemblances while resisting easy assimilation.

The effects of montage within the exhibition, the resemblances and juxtapositions, yielded associations that, for me as a student of Munch's

work, recast entrenched meanings. For example, the plastic cups used for a champagne toast in Emma's wedding scene in *Madame B*, stabbed me with their tawdriness. For me, they crystallized the irony of Emma's thwarted desire and the simulacra of relationships at the centre of the project. Turning from that sequence to Munch's *Wedding of the Bohemian* (1925–26), I recognized freshly the "martyr-like" aspect of the central female figure. I am not certain that I will view this painting, which Mieke Bal identifies as "a merciless critique of the institution [of marriage]" (*Emma and Edvard* 127), without the image of a made-in-China plastic cup as a metaphor. Nor will I be able to read that scene in the novel *Madame Bovary* without picturing that plastic cup. In this regard, montage and anachronism create entanglement.

"Entanglement" is a term, borrowed from quantum physics and from postcolonial studies, that describes a process which signifies more than mutually transformative temporality and experience, as it engages the ongoing, the political. Entanglement vectors particles, or peoples, so that they correlate, interact and remain entangled even when distanced and in isolation from one another. Within postcolonial studies, entanglement recognizes the condition of a mutually-constitutive relationship between colonizer and colonized (Therborn 295–97). I think about "entanglement" within the context of the exhibition and the book as a way of processing the many nexuses that they offer to us: anachronic temporality, in which Flaubert's Emma of the 1850s, Bal and Gamaker's Emma of 2014, Munch's works of the 1880s–1940s, *our* Emma (as we know and invent her from our reading of Flaubert), our Munch (as we know and invent him through our encounter with his works), the architecture of the Munch Museum, Bal and Gamaker's encounters with Maya Deren, Emily Dickinson, Sol LeWitt and others (among the many intertextual references in the videos), the mobility of our own bodies, and the symposium's references to Friedrich Nietzsche, Hedda Gabler, and Karl Ove Knausgård. Once Emma and Edvard are no longer looking sideways at or away from one another across the galleries of the Munch Museum, they will remain mutually transformative.

A difference between anachronism and entanglement may reside in duration, and in further webs of entanglement moving forwards and backwards. Entanglement in the installation requires a slowing down of time itself, and Mieke Bal's installation design prompts slow recognition. The unorthodox decision to install many of the paintings at knee-level, the benches that were provided throughout the galleries, and the increasingly darkened rooms were all prompts for deceleration. Here I am reminded of the art historian Jennifer L. Roberts, who practices what she

terms “immersive attention” (40). We often visit exhibitions in order to recognize, categorize, and Instagram individual works. The unexpectedly sunken location of the paintings on the walls of *Emma & Edvard: Love in the Time of Loneliness* required that the body of the standing adult viewer arched downward or became seated to regard the works at eye-level. Even the act of bending over invited a deceleration of the viewer’s transit through the galleries and a new temporal relationship between the viewing subject and the object of the gaze.

Slow regard enabled unseen or under-regarded details of Munch’s paintings to come into consciousness. For example, I had been looking at the painting *Nude with Long Red Hair* (1902; fig. 2) for many years and never before considered relevant a triangular wedge of dark brush strokes in the bottom left corner, which—viewed within the context of Bal’s installation—coalesced into the suggestion of a figure cropped at the canvas’s edge.¹ Were there a second figure in the original format (as I now imagine it), the red-haired woman would seem (in my imagination) to be vulnerable, her wide-eyed, sideways look not one of seduction (Bal, *Emma and Edvard* 108) but of self-protection. The kind of immersive attention required by the exhibition transformed canvas after canvas. The presence of the video screens installed through the galleries, which prompted the viewer’s attentiveness over time, provided cues to a more temporally generous regard of Munch’s paintings.

At the same time, as Ernst van Alphen notes, slow attention is constantly interrupted by the sideways glance—by the magnetic pull of objects and images that occur in our peripheral vision. This continual state of rupture is a central problem of modernity, according to van Alphen, a space between traumatic fragmentation and the creative deformations of the modern sensibility. Beginning with texts that articulate and manage the phenomenological shock of modernity, including Rainer Maria Rilke’s tram that races in, rattling with excitement, and then rattles on, over everything, to Walter Benjamin’s critique of cinema and agency, van Alphen locates literary and artistic modernism in that space of contradiction in which the troubling of the perceptual field intervenes. What Bal sees as a space “in between” figuration and abstraction, perhaps, van Alphen offers as a third thing, a modern arena filled with glitches and collisions that obviate any distinction between the abstract and the figurative or figured—what Bal in her book calls “dis-unification” (*Emma and Edvard* 122). The

¹ Munch Museum conservator Eun-Jin Strand Ferrer subsequently confirmed that the canvas had been part of a larger composition, and that excess canvas from the original format was folded at the back of the painting.

collisions and fragmentation engage both style and sensation. What van Alphen characterizes as higher insight is ours to experience through the contradictory collisions of video, the sonic environment and the paintings in the gallery through slow time and the eruptive proximity of entangled objects. The project is a form of cinematic suturing.

The state of desire seems, in all of the works encountered in the exhibition and in the symposium papers, to undergird the condition of loneliness. And desire is the medium for disunification. Bal's book, *Emma and Edvard Looking Sideways*, emphasizes how powerfully Emma Bovary desires desire itself. Upon entering the exhibition architecture, the viewer was framed by two large video screens. On them, Emma was seen to focalize desire: the left-hand screen displayed Emma conjuring images into being by creating a montage of photocopied images from art books and fashion magazines, and by colouring in black line drawings of pastiched works of art—including Bernini's *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* inserted into a landscape setting (fig. 3). Emma's manipulation of historical imagery thematized anachronism while also expressing her desire for sensation that can never be achieved through black-and-white renderings of such impossible montages. As Bal argued elsewhere, Bernini's image of St. Teresa's mystical experience was itself "the indispensable prosthesis through which Teresa's ecstasy can come to be preposterously an aftereffect" (Bal, "Ecstatic Aesthetics" 13). Emma's manipulations of St. Teresa's "prosthetic" ecstasy marked the distance between herself and her desire for sensation. On the right-hand screen, we saw Emma as she herself tried to see, to focus her eyes, to grasp an exhibition of the work of Sol LeWitt: "Where is the Art?", she queries. "It's around you," replies the Parisian gallerist. On both screens, Emma's desire was manifested through the impossibility of seeing what was right before her.

Kristin Gjesdal's paper concerned Ibsen's character, Hedda Gabler, and the impossible status of her own subjectivity as a desired subject/object and as the accumulation of perpetually thwarted desire. The play *Hedda Gabler*, she pointed out, is Ibsen's only work that is titled after a protagonist who no longer possesses the name. Hedda carries her father's surname, rather than her husband's (Tesman), as the embodiment of a past existence, her very name resonating with an eerie lapse in temporality. Gjesdal quoted the critic Edmond Gosse, identifying Hedda as the epitome of the monstrous New Woman, displaying "indifferentism and morbid selfishness, all claws and thirst for blood under the delicate velvet of her beauty." In contrast, Gjesdal offered one of Munch's scenographic sketches for *Hedda Gabler*, picturing the central figure as trapped in an "existential cul-de-sac of a life that appears unliveable."

Hedda is not the sum of her parts, but is instead profoundly fragmented through desire. Gjesdal located Hedda as a creation within the space occupied by Edvard and Emma, thereby offering a fascinating reading of Munch's Hedda, or one of Munch's Heddas, as a locus for the entrapments and discontents of domesticity (see Templeton). Through the rigid and almost hieratic body of the protagonist, held in a rectus of suppressed desire, Munch's Hedda can be seen as shaped and eroded by the desires of others. What I find so compelling here is the claim that in a sense Hedda cannot be pictured, as she is the object of so many networks of desire in the text and in the reviews and audiences that have shaped her that she, in a sense, becomes enigmatic, formless, existing in that space in between abstraction and figuration, fragmented, modern. As articulated by Slavoj Žižek, the desired object cannot be achieved: "desire's *raison d'être* is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire" (39). Munch's Hedda, as Gjesdal interpreted the image, articulates this conundrum of the object that is—like the Emmas of Flaubert and of Bal and Williams Gamaker—so propulsively doomed both to desire desire and to extinguish desire with finality.

Griselda Pollock identified such vulnerability as especially gendered. Pollock considered the performative function of a second self, or an avatar, the deployment of an image operating as a form of negotiation with history, memory and politics, that manages loneliness, desire and violence. Her discussion of the works of Charlotte Salomon had great resonance for the discussion of Edvard and Emma, both of whom look sideways in acts of distancing. Charlotte Salomon's autobiographic/autofictive *Singspiel* entangles with Emma's deployment of "Emmas," those facades that mask her loneliness, and Edvard's representations of "Edwards," those painted figures that stand in for the artist himself (see Endresen). This association is not to flatten differences among the identities of either the avatars or their inventors—by age, class, gender, ethnicity, privilege or inhibition, or by their radically different physical and political circumstances—but Pollock's discussion of "the production of the artist-subject" allowed for greater fluidity in interpretation in the gallery. Artists produce meanings and not subjects, Pollock reminded us, just as she redirected us to what she termed "the pleasure in paint itself." In this, she charged us to consider the inventive, experimental and often internally interruptive surfaces of Munch's works.

Bal's Munch is Edvard the narrator, Edvard the focalizer, the self-exiled, the deployed and performative identity as separate from Edvard Munch in history (Bal, *Emma and Edvard* 49). Likewise, Jonathan Culler called attention to Flaubert both as a focalizer of modernity—with its banalities and

cacophony—and the creator of Emma as the self-exiled. He quoted Henry James as characterizing Flaubert as “the novelist’s novelist,” and “for many of our tribe at large, the novelist.” He also emphasized Flaubert’s labour of art, the seeking of an aesthetic that would engage with modernity, endeavouring “a words book about nothing” in which “the book . . . would have hardly any subject—or at least in which the subject would be almost invisible.” Culler spoke of Flaubert’s writing as transcendence, the purity of expression. Emma as a character, as he reminded us, was limned through Flaubert’s absolute specificity of language and both empathic and critical analysis.

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I find notable, in this regard, the contrast between Flaubert’s and Munch’s articulated ambitions to shape a contemporary idiom: Flaubert, in a letter to Louise Colet in 1852, wrote: “There must be no more archaisms, clichés; contemporary ideas must be expressed using the appropriate crude terms; everything must be as clear as Voltaire, as abrim with substance as Montaigne, as vigorous as La Bruyère, and always streaming with colour” (qtd. in Steegmuller 160). Munch expressed a programme in 1889 that eschewed any notion of an “invisible” subject: “No longer would interiors, people who read and women who knit, be painted. There would be living people who breathe and feel, suffer and love” (qtd. in Heller 164).

At the same time, Culler noted that, despite *Madame Bovary*’s multi-generational presence, Emma was shapeless in and to history. She was seen in hyper and fictive acuteness by Charles to the point where she could not be seen at all (the whiteness of her nails) and was, moreover, disfigured by her own desire. Cullen’s demonstration of the many Emmas in history and criticism, the “Bovarysme,” whether pathological, liberationist, or both, exercised the entanglements of historical desire itself and magnified anxieties about women’s power, the social order, class and political economy. Emma’s shoulders were overburdened by accumulated meanings. Her pain and her appetites, her proclivity to look sideways rather than at the material and emotional realities set before her, and her desire for desire constituted, as Pollock and Gjesdal both remarked about Hedda Gabler, existential pain itself. Emma’s crisis was grounded not so much in “Why do I exist?,” but “How do I exist?,” or even, “Do I exist?”

Bal appealed to the cinematic as a way of approaching such questions interpolated through the figures of Emma and Edvard, through the entanglements, achronicity, accumulations and appeals to desire that framed her exhibition and set into motion the entire conference. Bal offered definitions of the cinematic—an intimation of movement and temporality (including the recognition of a painted surface that expresses motion); acts of perception (the superimposition of memory and embodiment); an invoca-

tion of the affective and the synesthetic; and the potential to move us to action in the social and political realm.

The exhibition architecture itself made the cinematic conspicuous, for example, in the perspectival tunnel created by two video screens that framed and guided vision toward Munch's painting *The Voice / Summer Night* (fig. 4). The activity of Charles and Emma as they first see one another across the facing screens made the figure in Munch's painting all the more fiercely silent in her fixity. The juxtaposition of painting and video fragments created a web of entanglements as the viewer suddenly recognized, reflexively, her or his own gaze enmeshed with the eyes of the painted woman. The network of looks that activated that space, and the soundscape created by the parabolic speakers, animated the gaze of the figure in *The Voice / Summer Night* so that it/she seemed fervently to be gazing back. Such was the entanglement of video and static painting.

Further, a small side gallery became a theatre of reflexive spectatorship, outfitted as a cinema with two rows of attached seating installed before a screen. Only a small corner of this gallery was visible through the doorway (lower right corner of fig. 1). Painted a deep red colour and embellished with an antique glass wall sconce, it called to mind a Victorian parlour or a bordello. Upon entering the gallery and recognizing the screen and seating to the right, the viewer realized that the illusion of entering a parlour suddenly collided with the sensation of being in a small motion picture theatre. This suturing of space, enacted through the movement of the viewer's body and gaze, created a cinematic sense of rupture. The theatre seating was designed perhaps not so much as an invitation to sit as it was a station to exercise a double form of looking, a discursive platform, watching the space of watching, itself.

The exhibition concluded with a mirror, installed next to a self-portrait by Munch. Its manifold operations included the reminder of the orthodox technique of the artist who, in the making of the self-representation, had to "look sideways" into a mirror to view himself in order to make himself visible. To coin a phrase from Pollock's lecture, such an effect demystified the "the production of the artist-subject" by calling out the apparatus of image construction: the mirror, present in the making of the self-portrait, but "off screen" in the painting, was therefore a reminder of representation itself. Further, by literally mirroring and trapping the viewer's scopic experience, that final object in the exhibition reflected the tensions within the project. Looking in the mirror, the viewer momentarily confronted the self before moving on, cinematically, to round the corner and exit, each movement and moment a motif. It operated in the space in between incomprehension and recognition, causing a rupture in viewing that brought

the notion of the cinematic into relief. Upon encountering a rectangular frame, having accumulated the memory of so many of such frames throughout the exhibition, the first glimpse of the mirror was of an “other,” so unexpected was it to see the self in the exhibition, a re-enactment of Freud’s “uncanny” encounter with his own reflection (Freud 371). To recognize the self was also to recognize that we were “seeing sideways,” suffering from “Bovarysme,” seeing an image (what we see) but not the picture (what it depicts) (Bal, *Emma and Edvard* 33). The mirror, along with Bal, Pollock, van Alphen, Gjesdal, Culler and Hernández Navarro, focalized the creators’ presence—Flaubert’s, Munch’s and our own—in an entangled authorship. A reviewer of the exhibition articulated this entanglement well:

Bal’s dual focus on the visual and the verbal not only enables me to see how strongly visual Flaubert’s writing is in *Emma Bovary*, thus making me more appreciative of the thematic effects of verbal visualisation. It also enables me to understand better how readable Munch’s painting is: seeing the exhibition, I “read” Munch’s paintings not least by responding to the elements of narrative of which they are possessed, and these narrative elements bear a significant relation to aspects of Flaubert’s verbal narrative. (Røed)

In the exhibition, the book, and the conference, we encounter Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and Bal and Gamaker’s *Madame B*. But we also need to consider Mieke Bal, the third “Madame B,” the curator of our intellectual and sensorial experience. As she reminds us, curating is the act of making meaning, “the dialogue between work, space, and viewer” (*Emma and Edvard* 48). It is her Flaubert, her Emma, and her Edvard that inhabit the intermedial and intertextual exhibition space in which we are actors constituting the “space in between,” in which we in turn invent and invest our Edwards and Emmas.

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Emma & Edvard Looking Sideways
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Fig. 1. Mieke Bal, *Emma & Edvard: Love in the Time of Loneliness*, exhibition design.



Fig. 2. Edvard Munch, *Nude with Long Red Hair*, 1902, oil on canvas, 120 x 50 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo.



Fig. 3. Mieke Bal and Michelle Williams Gamaker, still image shot from *Madame B.*



Fig. 4. Edvard Munch, *The Voice / Summer Night*, 1896, oil on unprimed canvas, 90 x 119.5 cm. Munch Museum, Oslo.

SHAKESPEARE IN NEW CONFIGURATIONS



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Authority in Crisis? The Dynamic of the Relationship Between Prospero and Miranda in Appropriations of *The Tempest*

ABSTRACT

The relationship between Prospero and Miranda is fairly typical for Shakespeare's way of portraying parental authority and filial obligation. A strong and authoritative father, an absent mother and a (potentially) rebellious daughter are character types reused in many of his plays. In *The Tempest*, authority, power and ownership, be it political or domestic, are important themes. In criticism, Prospero is frequently discussed through the prism of his attitude to his "subordinates"—Ariel, Caliban and Miranda—and the play's narrative is interpreted in the context of the theatre of power. Parental authority, a social construct, is a dynamic thing, and the Renaissance patterns discernible in Shakespeare's plays are refashioned and changed in contemporary adaptations and appropriations of his plays. Informed by New Historicism and Cultural Materialism in relation to gender studies, this article seeks to examine the changing dynamics of the Prospero-Miranda relationship in three films—Derek Jarman's (1979), Paul Mazursky's (1982), and Julie Taymor's (2010)—as well as Philip Osment's 1988 play *This Island's Mine*. Focusing on the issue of authority, power and ownership, the article aims at showing how stereotypical social and gender roles resonate with various political contexts of power.

Keywords: *The Tempest*, Julie Taymor, Philip Osment, Derek Jarman, fathers and daughters.

In their famous show, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, the Reduced Shakespeare Company rightly notice that Shakespeare was a formula writer: “Once he found a device that worked, he used it over and over and over again.” One of such successful formulae used repeatedly in his plays is a family with an authoritative father, a rebellious daughter and an absent mother.¹ Whether such a family pattern is to be treated as a comment on, or a reflection of, the patriarchal system of Shakespeare’s times, or merely as a replication of similar relations proliferating in, as Kate Chedzoy phrases it, “male-dominated literary culture” (13), the fact remains that Shakespeare’s plays abound in motherless daughters struggling with their overbearing fathers. Hermia and Egeus, Katherina, Bianca and Baptista, Jessica and Shylock, Princes Katherine and the King of France, Ophelia and Polonius, Desdemona and Brabantio, King Lear and his three daughters, Prospero and Miranda, and many more, follow the same pattern. The father stands for power and authority, very often being literally a political authority, like Lear or Prospero, with nearly unlimited power over his daughter, whom he treats not only as his property but also often as an asset in his political or economic agenda. The daughter seeks ways either to accommodate to her father’s wishes or to negotiate her own agenda. The mother is not present and often not even mentioned, which renders the daughter even more helpless. This also stresses the institutional insignificance of the mother figure and the social powerlessness of the female.

The pattern, dramatically successful regardless of the genre, works in a similar way in Shakespeare’s comedies, problem plays, tragedies and romances.² Typically, the equilibrium between the father/owner and daughter/property is unbalanced when the daughter attempts to challenge the authority of the father.³ In tragedies, regardless of whether the daughter

¹ As Lynda E. Boose observes, “father and daughter appear in twenty-one dramas” by Shakespeare (325).

² It is slightly different in his history plays where women are treated largely as political assets, which shifts the focus away from the family context.

³ In the majority of cases she does that by falling for a man not to her father’s liking, like Hermia, Jessica, Desdemona or Ophelia, although that is not necessarily the only scenario, as *King Lear* might illustrate. Boose again notices that “almost without exception the relationships . . . depend on significant underlying substructures of ritual. . . . And the particular ritual model on which Shakespeare most frequently drew for the father-daughter relationship was the marriage ceremony” (325). She further describes the symbolic significance of the marriage ceremony, as featuring in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, in which, through the agency of the priest, the daughter is transferred from the father to the husband. She very aptly stresses that in the transactional structure of the marriage ritual “[t]he mother of the bride is a wholly excluded figure—as indeed she is throughout almost the entire Shakespeare canon” (327).

successfully rebels (like Desdemona) or gives in to her father's authority (like Ophelia), she is bound to be punished for her disobedience by death. In comedies and romances, the daughters come out alive, although not necessarily victorious.⁴ *The Tempest* offers an interesting variation on the theme of the daughter's rebellion against the father's authority, as it ends in triumph for both sides. The daughter marries the man she loves, but he is at the same time her father's choice. Still, there is an echo of the traditional scheme with a less fortunate ending occurring in the marriage of princess Claribel, Alonso's daughter, to the King of Tunis.⁵ In this paper I wish to explore the relationship between Prospero as an authority father figure and Miranda as a (quasi)rebellious daughter in several versions of *The Tempest*. Each are different in terms of approach and medium, for they show the nature of that relationship in various cultural contexts. The texts to be analyzed are three film versions of the play—Derek Jarman's (1979), Paul Mazursky's (1982), and Julie Taymor's (2010)⁶—as well as Philip Osment's play inspired by and evoking *The Tempest, This Island's Mine* (1988).

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

In *The Tempest* the theme of power and authority is prevalent, and new historical, feminist and postcolonial readings help to highlight that aspect of the play. Greenblatt's seminal reading of romances, with a special focus on *The Tempest* in the context of the social practices of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is tellingly entitled "*Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne*" (emphasis mine). It indicates that the question of authority is central to the play. Across criticism and performance, Prospero is often seen as the figure denoting quintessential authority, and the associations of this character with Shakespeare and his institutionalized position not only in English but also global literature and culture help to establish his unfailing position of power.

⁴ There are comedies in which the daughter truly triumphs, like Hermia or possibly Jessica, although it must be stressed that it is the father who is left in despair. A more bitter ending, however, is not unusual, like in the case of Katherina.

⁵ This motif is forcefully visualized in Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, a film that with its focus on words, Prospero and authorship does not centralize the father-daughter relationship. Yet, Greenaway includes a shot of Claribel in the bedchamber of the king of Tunis, naked and bleeding in her marriage bed clearly after the act of consummation. As Ryle notices, the image illustrates Claribel's agony "lost to the machinations of political dynasty building" (183).

⁶ Both Jarman and Taymor use the text of the play, although Jarman cuts and rearranges it more freely than Taymor, to the point that his film is sometimes treated as a commentary on, rather than an adaptation of the play. Paul Mazursky's film, in an offshoot mode, loosely retells the play's narrative without the use of the playtext.

In Prospero's own words, he is "the Duke of Milan and / A prince of power" (1.2.54–55). His desire to regain this ducal position is the driving force of the events. Eventually he not only gets his throne back and successfully restores his authority in Milan, but also by marrying Miranda to Ferdinand manages to put his heirs on Alonso's throne, thus, extending his political authority through a peaceful conquest of Naples.⁷ Prospero is also the ruler of the island. Having arrived on the island, he took possession of it and its inhabitants, Ariel and Caliban.

The position of Prospero as the ruler of Caliban and Ariel is strongly marked in their initial exchanges. When Ariel first appears before Prospero, he says:

All hail, great master, grave sir, hail! I come
To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly,
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
On the curled clouds. To thy strong bidding task
Ariel, and all his quality. (1.2.189–93)

Ariel's language is the language of trained submission and servitude. He starts by saluting Prospero, and addresses him as a "great master" and "grave sir." What follows is an impressive litany presenting Ariel's readiness to perform any possible task to Prospero's "best pleasure." Prospero's response reaffirms the power relation between them: "Hast thou, spirit, performed to point the tempest / That I bade thee?" (1.2.194–95). With no unnecessary politeness the master demands from the servant a report on the assigned duties. Their further conversation develops in a more friendly vein as Prospero is pleased with Ariel's performance, yet his words of praise remain possessive: "my brave spirit" (1.2.206), "that's my spirit" (1.2.215). The tone of the conversation, however, changes dramatically at Ariel's mention of the promise of his liberty. Immediately, Ariel is brutally reminded of his obligations towards his saviour and master. Prospero calls him a liar, a "malignant thing" (1.2.257) and "my slave" (1.2.270), and in an act of psychological abuse forces him to relive the nightmare of the tortures Ariel suffered at the hands of Sycorax. Prospero finishes the discussion with a threat:

⁷ This conquest is quite consequential as Miranda, although a woman, is stronger and perhaps even more intelligent than Ferdinand. At the same time, she remains a puppet in her father's hands, unable to see through his ploys. Politically, that makes Ferdinand, the future king of Naples, a puppet in Prospero's hands.

If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak
And peg thee in his knotty entrails till
Thou hast howled away twelve winters. (1.2.294–96)

Prospero thus obtains an apology from Ariel—

Pardon, master;
I will be correspondent to command
And do my spiriting gently. (1.2.296–98)

—and restores his absolute power over the unruly servant.

The relationship between Prospero and Caliban, much more violent than that with Ariel, is based on the same dynamic. Prospero addresses Caliban as a “poisonous slave” (1.2.320), “most lying slave” (1.2.345) or “abhorred slave” (1.2.351), and yields absolute power over him. Caliban only manages to curse his master but, unable to successfully challenge his power, he is bound to bear whatever is demanded from him. Although the play consequently juxtaposes Ariel and Caliban on a number of levels, they are both clearly positioned as Prospero’s servants, and in this way they are aligned with each other, as well as with Miranda.

In comparison to other father-daughter relations in the Shakespearean canon, the Prospero-Miranda one is not necessarily seen as abusive. Boose, for example, stresses that “Miranda, like Perdita and Marina, is the force that preserves her father,” that Prospero is motivated by concern for Miranda’s welfare, and that “of all the Shakespearean fathers of daughters, Prospero is undoubtedly the most successful in enacting his proper role” (340). Fletcher and Novy notice that *The Tempest* frequently notes moments of paternal affection.⁸ One touching example they quote is the scene when Prospero recalls “little Miranda’s smile” (50). Still, they argue, “[h] owever common and desirable, affection was not the only crucial ingredient in the parent-child relationship” (Fletcher and Novy 50), and they continue to list more pragmatic—“patrilinear, primogenitural, and patriarchal,” as Stone would have it (qtd. in Boose 325)—aspects of familial

⁸ In their argument they contest the views of Stone (qtd. in Boose 325), who argued that in Elizabethan England parents treated children with formal distance and family relations were devoid of affection. Instead, they quote historians such as Wrightson, who finds ample evidence documenting “affection between parents and children in Elizabethan England” (Fletcher and Novy 50). Similarly, Boose clearly notes that fathers in Shakespeare’s plays frequently display strong emotional attachment to their daughters, which would seem to run counter to historical evidence on the family life of the period as related, for example, by Stone (325).

bonds. Indeed, in the context of *The Tempest's* central problems it is important to remember that Prospero is not only Miranda's father, but also the possessor and ruler of her political and redemptive potential. Although their relationship can be seen as emotional and caring, it denotes the same power status as Prospero's relation to Ariel or Caliban.

Notably, Prospero's first words to Miranda are imperatives and orders:

Be collected;
No more amazement. Tell your piteous heart
There's no harm done. (1.2.13–15; emphasis mine)

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He has full control over her, putting her to sleep and waking her up as he pleases, and manipulating her into falling in love with Ferdinand to secure Prospero's political victory. Their relationship throughout the play is very much a replication of the power arrangement from their first talk, in which he uses the language of power and manipulation, obsessively checking whether she is listening to his story, and channelling her thoughts, interests and feelings. His plan for Miranda's role in the revenge agenda—introducing the naïve Miranda to the isolated Ferdinand, imposing instant obstacles and consequently piling them up to foster their feelings, and eventually giving the young lovers his consent but delaying the fulfilment, proves that he treats her as a property that can yield profit if used wisely, and as an object that can be freely applied in his scheming. Seen in the context of the Early Modern politics of marriage, especially in aristocratic families, Miranda appears mainly as Prospero's personal property and a political asset, where her virginity is of crucial importance.⁹

Thus, the play's opening provides a series of Prospero's skilful manipulations of those who are at his disposal—first Miranda, then Ariel and Caliban, and then again Miranda and Ferdinand—which defines Prospero as the ultimate authority and the quintessential ruler. As the play develops, those traits are only replayed in various other contexts and circumstances, eventually leading to the restoration of Prospero's legal authority and celebration of his rightful power.

Understanding Prospero as a magician, having command over spirits but also over words, further stresses his power as the dominating principle of the play. For Greenblatt, his “potent and disturbing power of magic”

⁹ She is a truly valuable political asset only as long as she can bear Ferdinand's legitimate children, thus securing the throne of Naples for Prospero's heirs. That attitude is clearly visible in Prospero's conversation with Ferdinand about keeping Miranda's chastity before the wedding (1.4), where her virginity seems to be treated in a strictly proprietary sense.

(142) is the exemplification of the strategy of “salutary anxiety” (20): it is the source of the characters’ fear and unease, as well as the mechanism of the final happy resolution. A master of the words, Prospero literally teaches Caliban to speak and controls others by his words. He uses the language of command and ownership,¹⁰ heavily relying on possessive pronouns and imperatives. Also metaphorically, the play’s magician is the figure of poetic and dramatic authority, a metaphor of Shakespeare and his command of words.

Unsurprisingly, *The Tempest* and its main protagonist has become an inspiring subject of scrutiny for feminist and postcolonial discourses which offer politically charged readings of Prospero’s patriarchal and colonial authority, and which open the play’s power relations for new contexts (cf. Loomba, Greenblatt, Orgel, Kamps, and others). There exists a vast body of critical work analyzing Prospero’s behaviour as an illustration of the functioning of a patriarchal system and/or the mechanisms of colonial oppression. Miranda, Ariel and Caliban, as well as Sycorax, have been studied as victims of oppressive and discriminating practices, and their actions as reflections of various patterns of dealing with such practices. In such political perspectives, the possible ways of looking at *The Tempest* are essentially of two types, following either the subversion or the containment model, that is seeing the play either as a mere reflection of the existing status quo and an affirmation of the presented power arrangements (containment), or as a critical vision of those, attempting to challenge the presented status quo (subversion). Prospero’s power might then be seen as legitimate and his doings as just and moral, with Miranda and Ariel seen as the means and agents necessary for the execution of justice and order, while Caliban as the disruptive element that needs to fail and be eventually punished. Using such interpretation feminist and postcolonial scholars show how *The Tempest* can be understood as a play informing readers of the Renaissance frame of mind and social reality. A subversive reading would look for disruptive potential within the play, for instance in moments when the power relations on which the play is based are undermined by the play’s narrative.¹¹

¹⁰ A very good example of such language is the exchange between Prospero and Ferdinand when they speak of marriage. Finally agreeing to let Ferdinand marry Miranda, Prospero says: “Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition / Worthily purchased, take my daughter” (4.1.13–14).

¹¹ One of the most frequently mentioned instances is the reading of Caliban’s poetic observations on the island’s beauty as proof of his native sensitivity to his natural habitat. This is contrasted with Prospero’s inability to feel at home on the island seen in his reliance on Caliban for fire or food, and on Ariel for control of the elements, as well as in Prospero’s obsessive desire to return “home” to civilization.

Also unsurprisingly, numerous adaptations of the play take a similar path, interpreting the characters and relations among them in ways that challenge the play's structure. It is very interesting to observe the various strategies employed for dealing with this power-infused play. They centre round Prospero's authority figure and question or defy that authority by re-imagining the play's hierarchies and power relations. The four different versions of the play that I will analyze in various ways deconstruct and contest *The Tempest's* structure, specifically concerning the relationship between Prospero and Miranda.

DEREK JARMAN'S *THE TEMPEST* (1979)

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For a long time Derek Jarman's 1979 film was marginalized and dismissed as not being faithful enough for an adaptation and treated more as an attempt to "remake" Shakespeare's play into "a commentary on the 1970s counterculture movement" in Britain "intended for punk and gay audiences" (Vaughan and Vaughan 200, 209). But it is precisely the fact that Jarman's film is an example of anti-establishment politics, counterculture art and acute social commentary that makes it particularly interesting in the context of authority as it radically repositions the play's power and gender relations.

Jarman's primary focus in adapting the play is the relationship between Prospero and Ariel, making it "the emotional centre" of the film (Harris and Jackson 97). He frames the whole film as a dream vision or a fantasy of Prospero, and "place[s] the action entirely within the mind of Prospero" (Collick 99). In the opening sequence Prospero is shown asleep, tossing and turning, dreaming a troubling dream of the tempest, and wakes to thunder. The film finishes with Prospero peacefully sleeping to the voiceover of his famous lines "[o]ur revels now are ended. . . . We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (4.1.148–58). Framed as a dream, the film's narrative escapes clear logic and Prospero's world is hardly controllable, least of all by him. Judith Buchanan claims that "Jarman's Prospero has only an erratic control over his world" (163) and suggests that Prospero is presented "as the victim of his own imaginative vision" (164). Crucially she also remarks that "[u]ndermining Prospero's authority was in keeping with Jarman's attitudes more generally" (164) and quotes Jarman saying: "I distrust all figures of authority, including the artist" (164).

What adds to Prospero's status of undermined authority is that, consistently with Jarman's political agenda, the film celebrates gay fantasies, foregrounding homoerotic tension between Prospero and Ariel. Within

the dream vision frame Ariel can be interpreted as Prospero's suppressed homosexuality that, like Ariel in the play, demands to be released.¹² Thus, since the film's central focus is on Prospero's fantasies of desire towards Ariel and on the intimate, turbulent and tense relationship between them, Prospero appears much less of a father figure, his relatively young age in comparison to Miranda's further complicating the authenticity of the father-daughter relation. Consequently, his paternal authority is deliberately minimized. How unimportant Miranda is for him is communicated in the very fact that they do not share many scenes. Miranda is frequently shown on her own, wandering around the mansion, hardly her father's central interest, and very much left to her own devices.

Freed from the dominating presence of her father, Miranda appears as the far more empowered character. She is played by Toyah Wilcox, a punk star, which gives her character the off-screen context of rebellion, non-conformity and power. Also her solo appearances in the film, when she roams the gothic mansion with no sense of fear, or when she rehearses moves on the stairs in preparation for a more civilized life, as well as when she tries on clothes to see what she likes, define her as a woman who is quite independent, who can take care of herself, and who makes decisions for herself. Miranda is consistently interpreted as empowered and self-confident, in relation to Prospero, Caliban and Ferdinand alike.

Her relationship with Caliban, for example, is deprived of the shadow of revulsion and sexual threat. Although Caliban, played by Jack Birkett, is rather disgusting, he is neither seriously threatening nor in any way dangerous for Miranda. They often share childish jokes and seem to be at ease with each other. In a crucial scene defining their power relation Caliban is shown entering Miranda's bedroom as she is washing herself, half-naked. Although she is alone in the room, she is unconcerned about Caliban's entry. When he does attempt to touch her, she confidently kicks him out of her room, and laughs jovially when he intentionally farts on leaving her room.

In relation to Ferdinand she is also placed in a position of power. Ferdinand from the beginning is marked as vulnerable.¹³ There is a long scene in which he, naked, wades through the sea to get to the shore. He does it with visible effort, and the length of the scene makes a point of

¹² Similarly to the reading of Harris and Jackson (97), both Ariel and Caliban in their binary opposite structuring can be read as two opposing forces within Prospero's (sub)conscious, Caliban standing for base physicality and heterosexuality, and Ariel for sublime eroticism and homosexuality.

¹³ Caliban, similarly, is marked as vulnerable, and therefore harmless, by the very fact that he is played by Jack Birkett, *The Incredible Orlando*, a blind gay performer.

his exhaustion and weakness. His full frontal nudity is, in this context, deprived of its sexual potential and becomes a marker for his defencelessness. When he finally reaches the mansion, he lies down on a heap of straw and curls up in an embryo position. This is how Miranda finds him, and this confrontation again stresses that his nakedness marks not his sexual attractiveness but his physical weakness. Ferdinand's inferiority to Miranda is then restated in their game of chess. As Renes puts it,

She takes one of Ferdinand's pieces, presumably beats him at the game and corrects him verbally for his bad play after a servant has placed a perfectly-fitting, beautiful shoe on her foot, which pertains to her wedding dress. The whole vision is meant to be empowering and does away with the innocent play at tennis and hide-and-seek of Ferdinand and Miranda in previous scenes. She sheds her childlike mask, clarifies that the time for play is over, exhorts him to take serious action and actively participates in the political business of usurpation under way (min.75). (5)

Indeed, in her "trying out" the outfits and choreographing her movements the consciousness and intentionality of her actions is foregrounded—she first checks if she likes the new role she is to play, and only having decided that she finds it fitting does she embrace it. Hence, in the wedding scene she sits on the throne, radiant and happy, a confident new queen of Naples, while Ferdinand appears as her retinue rather than a partner or king.

In her childlike playfulness she retains elements of Miranda's innocence from the play, but she is not an object that can be freely manipulated. She is an independent subject that makes her own choices. Further, with a clear focus on repressed homoerotic desire as Prospero's central interest and driving force, the transactional value of Miranda is less significant. As Prospero and Ariel take the emotional and erotic charge of the film, Miranda's physicality, as well as her sexual and biological potential are largely dismissed. In this subversive way, she is also de-objectified, both as the father's property and as the play's redemptive tool. Very importantly, the redemptive power of the final union through Miranda, so crucial for Shakespeare's romance, is dismissed in Jarman's film, as the real coda is the release of Ariel—the release of homosexual desire—and Prospero's final satisfaction in sleep.

PAUL MAZURSKY'S *TEMPEST* (1982)

Paul Mazursky's *Tempest* retells the narrative of Shakespeare's play in a very interesting way. As Buchanan notices, in the film Mazursky's typical "preoccupation with drifting, purposeless men unwilling to, or incapable of, mak-

ing active determinations about their own lives” collides with the “naturally antithetical concerns of the play” (167–68). Philip Dimitrius, the Prospero figure, is a New York architect who struggles with a midlife crisis. Restless and self-absorbed, he quits his job. When he realizes that his wife, Antonia—a replacement for the treacherous Antonio—an actress and celebrity, has an affair with Alonzo, Philip’s former boss, he decides to go to a desert island in Greece to reassess his life. His daughter, Miranda, turns away from the mother and decides to go to Greece with Philip. On the way to the island they meet Aretha, an Ariel figure, who goes to the island with them. They stay on a small island, their only company being a local inhabitant, Kalibanos, and his goats. Incidentally, Antonia, Alonzo and a couple of other people, including Alonzo’s son Freddy, spend their holidays on a yacht nearby and a storm brings them to Philip’s island. Once all the characters get together, the family crisis is resolved and Philip and Antonia are reconciled.

One of the major changes in relation to the play, where Prospero’s authority positions all other characters as subordinates, is the focus on the theme of man’s midlife crisis, which places Philip/Prospero in the position of powerlessness. Additionally, the fact that the film features Philip’s wife, which gives Miranda a mother, dramatically alters the play’s power arrangements within the family. Essentially, Philip’s crisis of masculinity is presented in relation to three powerful women—his wife, his daughter and his lover—who each in her own way highlight Philip’s failures and weaknesses.

Antonia and Aretha serve to reveal certain aspects of Philip’s personality, and to illustrate the mechanism of his midlife crisis. In comparison to Antonia, who is reasonable but at the same time very kind, and who shows understanding and concern for him and his anxieties, Philip behaves in a childish, self-centred and irrational way. Aretha provides a different contrast. Unlike Antonia, she is intuitive and happy-go-lucky, but in her chaotic pursuit of love and happiness she is, in fact, oriented on other people’s needs and problems, which highlights Philip’s uselessness and egoism.

The most important relation, however, is that with Miranda. Miranda is a teenager, herself struggling with a difficult period of puberty. She is typically rebellious, and her problems with her awakening sexuality make her mother a natural enemy. Antonia is presented as a sensible, caring and loving mother, and a rather understanding wife, in contrast to Philip, who is selfish and irresponsible, both as a father and a husband. However, when Miranda finds out about her mother’s affair, which is prompted by Philip’s failure as a husband, she sees it as a legitimate reason to push her mother away and form an alliance with her otherwise incompetent father. By contrast, she has no problem with her father having a lover and she eagerly befriends Aretha.

Thus, the film shows the alliance of Philip and Miranda as a result of *her* choice, Philip having done very little to deserve it. The father in crisis can function as an authority to Miranda only because she chooses this substitute in an act of revolt against her mother. For Miranda, in her immature understanding of the world, her father stands for freedom and a lack of compromise, but in time she realizes that he only cares about his own freedom and she begins to miss being taken care of. While she appears to be lost in her puberty turmoil as much as Philip is in his midlife crisis, she comes round quicker and emerges from the experience on the Greek island as someone who is more mature and more complete.

Miranda's strength in contrast to Philip's failure as a father is particularly visible in the context of Kalibanos. The eccentric Kalibanos, who lives in a cave with his goats, is the only resident of the island before the arrival of Philip and Miranda. Like Shakespeare's Caliban, he is the force of nature—direct, physical and instinctive. He is attracted to Miranda, being the first to actually acknowledge her transition from girlhood to womanhood, and keeps stalking her and making clumsy sexual advances. Philip genuinely perceives Kalibanos as a threat to Miranda's virginity and seems to be honestly worried about his daughter's safety, but not to the point of giving up on his own indulgence in the blissful life of the island. In this, he again fails as a father, prioritizing his comfort over what he believes to be a threat to his daughter.

Luckily, Miranda is not afraid of Kalibanos, and is perfectly capable of managing the "threat" on her own. Her confidence, as well as her growing awareness of her femininity, is shown in a scene when Kalibanos invites her to his cave to show her a treasure. She accepts the invitation not because she is too naïve to sense the danger, but because she knows there is no true danger. The treasure, proudly presented by Kalibanos, appears to be a TV set. Kalibanos turns it on and Miranda, missing the little joys of civilization, happily begins to watch a film. As she is watching it, Kalibanos has a quick wash and dresses up for her. She catches a glimpse of his mating preparations but dismisses them with a laugh. Then he sits close to her and expresses his desire to make love to her. She allows him to kiss her hand and seems to be actually considering the possibility of sex, but eventually pushes him away and leaves the cave. In tone, the scene is reminiscent of that between Caliban and Miranda in Jarman's film. The women in both films are aware of their attractiveness to Caliban and Kalibanos respectively, but they do not treat the man as a threat because they trust in their ability and power to take care of themselves. Unlike in the play, where Prospero is the guardian of Miranda's body, in these two films Prospero/Philip holds no power, be it possessive or protective, over Miranda, and the daughter proves stronger than the father.

In Mazursky's film the relationship between Miranda and Philip takes a confrontational turn in the disturbing scene when Philip almost forces himself upon his daughter. He sees her practising dancing in an evening dress, with make-up, and admits he thought she was her mother. Telling her she is beautiful, like her mother, he wants to dance with her, which she refuses. He then keeps forcing her to dance with him, and she tries to get away from him. He eventually holds her tight, giving her a weird look. It seems that at this moment he realizes what Kalibanos has seen from the beginning and what Miranda came to understand fairly quickly—that his daughter is no longer a child but a woman. He instantly lets her go and the tension is gone, but the feeling of awkwardness remains. This is the moment for the ultimate collapse of Philip's position of paternal authority, and of Miranda's consequential assertion of her will. She tells him that she hates the island and that he is crazy. This assertion is, at the same time, the end of her teenage rebellion against the mother, so when Antonia appears on the island Miranda is ready to embrace her as a mother and admit that she still needs to be taken care of. Thus, she becomes an agent in restoring family harmony.

The film offers a happy ending which, like in the play, is possible due to the redemptive power of a woman, or rather of all three women with whom Philip interacts. They help him to acknowledge his failures—as a husband, as a father, as a lover, and as a human being—by encouraging him to stop looking primarily at himself. Aretha urges him to reconcile with his wife saying “it's time to forgive,” but when he approaches Antonia it is him who actually asks her forgiveness. Easily forgiven, he is surprised, but Antonia explains: “I love you.” Miranda's maturity shows him the extent of his stupidity, Aretha's selflessness shows him his egotism, and Antonia's forgiveness and love gives him hope for the future.

Prospero's royal and paternal authority in Shakespeare's play is in the film translated into Philip Dimitrius's illusion of control over his family or his life, an illusion revealing masculinity in crisis. Mazursky challenges Philip's failing masculinity by granting more authority and maturity to Miranda, and by highlighting other strong female characters—Antonia and Aretha. “Girl power,” however, is not shown as aggressive or confrontational. Instead, drawing from the formula of Shakespeare's romances, femininity is redemptive, offering solutions through love, forgiveness and kindness.

PHILIP OSMENT, *THIS ISLAND'S MINE* (1987)

Philip Osment's *This Island's Mine* was a play written for, and performed by, the Gay Sweatshop in London in 1987. As “[a] sweeping update of the systemic colonialism and oppression from the time of *The Tempest*, translating

early modern conditions into their current analogues” (Fischlin and Fortier 255), the play became part of Osment’s struggle against Thatcher’s oppressive home politics. It offers a blend of postcolonial, feminist and queer perspectives, with particular characters resonating with Shakespeare’s play. The Prospero/Miranda dynamic is mirrored in the relationship of Stephen and Marianne. Stephen is an American businessman in his mid-sixties, a WW II veteran, as well as a man of power and success:

White hair in stylish cut
Tanned urban face
Expensive grey suit
Looking half his age
Relaxed and powerful. (Osment 266)

His daughter, Marianne, lives in London. She entered into a marriage of convenience with Martin, who is gay, and she is living with her partner, Debbie, and Debbie’s son:

Marianne, a southern belle,
Escaped to England to become a dyke
Away from the persistent scrutiny of her North Carolina family.
From a mother whose little girl can do no right
And a father whose little girl can do no wrong—
Both impossible to live up to. (Osment 261)

Their relationship in the play is one of several intertwined subplots and is told in episodes. Their first confrontation occurs when they meet during Marianne’s father’s business trip to England. They meet in a restaurant and Marianne, preparing for the meeting, tries to build an aura of defiance around her. For her, this confrontation is one of many attempts to prove her independence from her father, and to establish herself as a fully developed person, no longer his little daughter. The ways in which she tries to challenge his power—not just paternal power, but also the power of his money and confidence—are naïvely provocative. When first greeting him, she deliberately mentions her partner and her child, which he smoothly passes over:

MARIANNE “Sorry I’m late, Dad,
I had to give Debbie’s kid his tea
When he got home from school.”
Trying to make this reference to her
English lover seem

Natural and spontaneous.

BOTH

Chasms open.

STEPHEN

He hands her the menu.

“I’ve only just gotten myself.

It all took longer than expected.” (Osment 266–67)

Also, she is wearing a provocative badge, which he notices after a while:

“Hell, Marianne,

What is that button you’re wearing?”

...

He holds it

A tiny badge

In his large paw

With its raw message:

US BASES OUT OF BRITAIN.

He looks at it for several moments

Then hands it back.

“Have you ever considered buying a place to live over here, Marianne?”

(Osment 267)

Again he ignores her provocation but this time he strikes back with a weapon that never fails him—money.

Later in the play it turns out that Stephen offered to buy Marianne a house, and Marianne apparently falls into the trap of her father’s material superiority and authority. In a conversation with her partner, Debbie, it is clear how Marianne’s thinking is clouded by the life of luxury and comfort that her father can offer her under his dominating care:

MARIANNE “Oh God, it’s such a big decision.

What do I do?

If I say yes,

Then I’ll feel that they’ve gotten hold over me again.

It’ll be like I never left the States.”

DEBBIE “Then say no.”

MARIANNE “If I say no,

It just feels like a childish gesture.” (Osment 270)

Marianne appears to be trapped between her desire to contest Stephen’s control over her life, and her inability to successfully redefine their

father-daughter relationship. Unwilling to become totally estranged from her father, she is, at the same time, unable to communicate with him on terms different than his.

Debbie, in contrast, struggled for years to get out of her marriage and worked for her independence without anybody's help—"I've made my choices. / My kid, / My home, / My independence" (Osment 270). Her blunt comments present a very different view of Marianne's dilemma, exposing the mechanism of Marianne's subservience to Stephen's power:

DEBBIE "She wants sympathy now!
She's got the luxury of being able to torment herself
About whether she accepts a handout of seventy thousand quid,
She spends hours bellyaching to me about it,
Till I'm ready to climb up the wall
And on top of that she wants sympathy!" (Osment 270)

Later Marianne meets her childhood companion, Jody, the daughter of her parents' black maid who raised Marianne, and learns two major facts about her farther. One is that Stephen is also Jody's father. As Jody puts it,

"... from what I understand he pursued her,
...
What was she do to?
He was white,
A man
Her boss.
She was black
A woman
His maid.
And it was 1949." (Osment 280)

Jody, who works for a charity organization, also tells Marianne that Stephen's company was selling cheap, unscreened blood to the Third World, a scandal over which Jody and Stephen had a serious argument. These revelations are crushing for Marianne, and she seeks comfort in both Jody and Debbie. When she confronts her father, however, "pale, nervous, her lip trembling at the audacity of her accusations," Stephen is "quiet, thoughtful, listening to her, allowing her to finish" (Osment 282). He then tells her his version of the story, presenting both situations in a very different light. His rational arguments are only part of his strategy with Marianne, his ultimate weapon being his appeal to her love for him and his love for her:

STEPHEN "Do you know who brought the sweetness back?
You did, Marianne.
When you came along I couldn't believe my good fortune.
You're not going to turn against your old Dad now, are you?"
MARIANNE "I . . ."
STEPHEN "And you'll come out with me on Thursday night?
It's my last night in London."
. . .
"Do you love your old Dad, Marianne?" (Osment 282)

What is striking in this final exchange between Marianne and Stephen, after which they indeed go to the theatre on Thursday night before he goes back to the States, is Stephen's absolute belief that he is always right. Stephen, being a white affluent American man comes across as a person who knows, truly and deeply, that he is always right and that he is a good man. He has an answer for everything, and his version is always the strongest because he has both the money and the power which are as solid as rock. In that sense, there is no way of winning an argument with him, and Marianne feels that too. The play seems to suggest that in the end Marianne might accept the offer of money from Stephen in order to buy herself a place in London.

Osment's play is a rare case of a reinterpretation which instead of looking for ways to undermine Prospero's authority uses Shakespeare's character to point to the fact that in the contemporary world there are numerous Prospero-like figures who hold power regardless of any social or political change. As Susan Bennett argues, "England may well have lost its Empire, but, as Osment's play powerfully demonstrates, the Prosperos have not lost their will for imperialism" (148).

Marianne's lack of independence, or, perhaps worse still, her lack of awareness of how dependent on her father's authority she remains, is not criticized but rather shown as a result of larger mechanisms. Her determination to change the dynamic within her family is shown as futile, because the power that her father represents is overwhelming. Stephen's paternal and patriarchal authority is governed by the same principles according to which rich white men rule the world's economy and politics, rendering others—be it women, children, people of colour, homosexuals, or the working class—inescapably marginalized and disempowered. Moreover, the status of people like Stephen places them beyond simple categories of good or bad. Whatever they do is validated by the very fact that it is them who do it, which makes any attempt at defying or criticizing them problematic. Marianne herself is painfully aware of the fact that her attempts to challenge her father may be seen as childish or silly. Like Shakespeare's

Miranda, she may eventually do what her father would like her to do, seeing it as the only, and therefore,—good choice.

JULIE TAYMOR'S *THE TEMPEST* (2010)

Julie Taymor achieved critical acclaim for being awarded a Shakespeare scholarship in 1999 when she directed *Titus*, a visually impressive and interpretatively interesting adaptation of Shakespeare's early tragedy. Her second Shakespearean film, *The Tempest*, was awaited with much expectation, especially owing to her decision to have Prospero replaced with a woman, Prospera, who would be played by Helen Mirren. However, the film largely failed to satisfy audiences and critics.¹⁴ Visually spectacular, especially in portraying magic, it proved quite uninspiring interpretatively, approaching the text in a traditional way. Jordison, for example, calls it "stagey and static," and admits it is a "straightforward rendition of *The Tempest*, but for the fact that Prospero becomes Prospera." Ebert also believes that "the best thing [Taymor] does is change the sex of Prospero," and that with this change "all the relationships on the island curiously seem more natural when the character becomes a woman."

For a reading of power relations and authority in the play, the change of Prospero's gender is heavily consequential. Prospero, being male, royal and white, simply *has* the power. It is a default setting of a kind, a position taken for granted, the effects of which echo in Osment's play. When the authority character is a woman, however, the default setting is no longer valid. A woman has to prove she can establish authority and maintain her power over the island, over its inhabitants, and over the men that arrive on the island.

It is very noticeable in the film that Prospera constantly has to struggle to keep her position. In Shakespeare's play Prospero never really performs any magic. He only issues commands and orders, and the magic is performed by Ariel, who then reports back to Prospero. In Taymor's film, Prospera is shown performing magic herself, starting with the initial tempest that shipwrecks Alonso and his company. Ariel does accept her commands but their relationship is slightly different: as both of them work hard to magically implement Prospera's plan, Ariel seems more of an accomplice, or a helper, than just a servant. Although Taymor does not alter Shakespeare's text, she retains the harsh reprimand that Ariel gets from Prospera when at the play's beginning he asks for his freedom. The fact

¹⁴ The film proved to be a financial fiasco; with a budget of around twenty million dollars it made less than three hundred thousand over the first two months (see www.imdb.com).

that Prospera is shown not just as someone who gives an order but also as a working magician gives a touch of partnership to their relation.

Also Prospera's relation with Caliban radically changes due to the sex shift. Caliban, played by a West Indian actor, Djimon Hounsou, appears as a strong, muscular and physical man, clearly a threat not only to Miranda but also to Prospera. In confrontations with Caliban Prospera's underlying weakness and her effort to keep him under control are visible. For her, it is a constant struggle, and she has to literally defend herself with her magic staff. Throughout the film she appears carrying the staff, which becomes an extension of her power, a phallic representation of the assumed, or perhaps even usurped, authority that she as a woman does not have. The final confrontation with her treacherous brother and his company, when she forms a protective circle of fire around her and her enemies, visually marking the areas of her power and control, also illustrates how much of a strain it is for a woman to prove capable of dominating men. It seems that she accepts her victory with much relief and leaves the island happily, released of the necessity to command others. Ebert rightly notices that, being female, Prospera shows "more ferocity than resignation" in comparison to a typical reading of Prospero as the figure of a magician saying farewell to his magic. But what lies at the core of that ferocity is not will but necessity—for a woman in a man's world it takes immense strength to achieve the status that is normally granted to men.

The second consequence, central to the focal point of this paper, is Prospera's relationship with Miranda. Ebert notices that a daughter at the side of a mother is "more suited" and that Prospera "empathizes with [Miranda] as Prospero never did." The mother and the daughter are very often shot together, standing side by side or with Prospera protecting Miranda. Visually, their relationship is far from the confrontational arrangement that the commanding and dominating language of the play suggests. Prospera, herself aware of her physical weakness, is protective of her daughter not because she treats her as an asset and property, but because she sees an even weaker woman in her. While Shakespeare's Prospero is motivated primarily by his political agenda and treats Miranda, like other characters, instrumentally, Prospera's impulses to secure her daughter's future appear to be both royal and maternal. The moment when she eventually gives Miranda to Ferdinand clearly shows the true nature of her feelings for her daughter. When saying goodbye to Miranda she finds it hard to part with her and they hold hands for a long time. It seems that Prospera's harsh treatment of Ferdinand is not only a way to inject a sense of passion between the young couple, but also a test of his character to assure the mother that as a man he would be a worthy hus-

band for her daughter.¹⁵ When Prospera speaks to Ferdinand about Miranda's virginity, the motivation behind the mother's concerns is highlighted. Prospero's words

If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be ministered, (4.1.15–17)

are cut by Jarman and subverted by Mazursky; Taymor, in turn, gives them an interesting resonance. What the mother is concerned with is not her daughter's political position and the security of her progeniture, but Miranda's future *happiness*. The mother wants to make sure that Ferdinand will love and respect her daughter. Satisfied with the look on his face she gently urges him: "Sit then, and talk with her" (4.1.32), hoping he will take good care of Miranda.

Shakespeare's characters and plays are flexible enough for readers and interpreters to mould them to their liking. In the case of *The Tempest* it is interesting that contemporary writers and directors tend to depart from the image of power and authority that Shakespeare's Prospero embodies, and not only seek to challenge the traditionally positive image of Prospero, but also to renegotiate the very sense of the character's authority. Jarman disarms Prospero in two ways: by empowering Miranda he takes away Prospero's paternal and possessive qualities, and by shifting the centre of attention to the homoerotic tension between Prospero and Ariel he explores Prospero's vulnerability, making Ariel the character with ultimate control and redeeming power.

Mazursky quite blatantly strips Philip (Prospero) of his status exploring the character's midlife crisis. He shows him as being arrogant, egoistic, useless and failing. It is through confrontations with the female characters—his wife, Antonia, who is strong and caring, his girlfriend Aretha (an Ariel figure) who is deeply empathic and totally selfless, and his daughter Miranda, growing mature and confident—that he finally learns to look beyond himself and earns his redemption.

Julie Taymor in a way tries to keep Prospera's power but at the same time justifies her ferocity and ruthlessness. As a woman, Prospera has to constantly prove to the men around her that she deserves respect, and as a mother she really has no choice because her daughter's future prosperity

¹⁵ The fragment in which Prospera apologizes to Ferdinand for the way she treated him and explains that it was only to test his love sounds very honest, and the scene when she talks of how much Miranda means to her is a touching declaration of motherly love. Although the film retains Prospero's words calling Miranda an "acquisition worthily purchased," Prospera sounds very passionate and makes it clear that Miranda's value to her is not economic or political, but emotional.

and happiness can only be guaranteed through brutal negotiations with those who hold power in a man's world.

Osment remains the closest to the essence of Prospero's strength. His Stephen unfailingly and arrogantly believes in his unlimited power and uses it to the full. While Osment stresses the attempts of other characters, like Marianne (Miranda),¹⁶ to challenge the system of oppression, be it in areas such as class, ethnicity, sexuality or gender, he also highlights the ultimate challenge for all subordinates: the challenge of what Jean Genet has called "the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorized repression" (qtd. in Churchill 245).

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¹⁶ Marianne's struggles are paralleled by the narrative of Selwyn—the Caliban character—a black gay actor who runs his own crusade for social acceptance.

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The Cultural Role and Political
Implications of Poland's 1947
Shakespeare Festival

ABSTRACT

Emerging from the atrocities of war, and still hoping to avert the results of the Yalta conference during which the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, including Poland, were “handed over” to Stalin, Poland’s 1947 Shakespeare theatre festival was a sign of courage and defiance. At the Festival 23 productions of 9 Shakespeare’s dramas were staged by theatres in 11 towns, with its finale in Warsaw. My paper will show that the Festival was an attempt to demonstrate both Polish cultural links with Europe, and to subvert Marxist ideology and Soviet culture.

Keywords: Communist regime, World War 2, Marxist ideology, Soviet culture, Shakespeare in Poland, Cold War.

The end of World War II, from which Poland emerged victorious, but devastated, not only inspired joy of liberation, but also an urge to revive the Arts. The main aim of the national Shakespeare Festival held from 17 July to 31 July 1947 was to activate Polish cultural life; however, it also became implicated in politics. As an active participant in the political events of Polish history, Shakespeare found himself at the bulwark of democracy amidst the encroaching communist enslavement of the Central and South-Eastern Europe (Kujawińska Courtney, “Celebrating Shakespeare” 23–25).

Still hoping to avert the results of the Yalta conference during which the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, including Poland, were “handed over” to Stalin, Poland’s 1947 Shakespeare theatre festival was a sign of courage and defiance. It was not only an attempt to demonstrate Poland’s connection to Western Europe, while at the same time subverting Marxist ideology and Soviet culture, but also an attempt to reclaim the Polish theatre’s pre-war international status. It is significant that Shakespeare was selected by the Polish theatre as the patron of this ambitious endeavour.¹

The Shakespeare Festival was probably inspired by Waclaw Borowy’s article “W jakich przekładach grać Szekspira” (“According to Which Translation Are We to Act Shakespeare?”) published in the newly-created monthly *Teatr* in 1945. The opening lines of his work, “after six years of theatrical hunger we thirst after GREAT THEATRE,” succinctly evaluated the aspiration of the Polish people after World War II:

We are neither particularly interested in any kind of light entertainment (which we would wholeheartedly welcome in some other time), nor are we interested even in the so-called regular theatre repertory. We long for GREAT POETRY (presented . . . in great renditions). (27–28)²

Expanding his line of reasoning, Borowy explained that theatre lovers unquestionably yearned for Shakespeare, who for centuries had been regarded as one of the most important poets and dramatists in the Polish arts. To prove his point, the critic presented his comparative study of the most eminent Polish translations of Shakespeare’s texts, stressing their role both in pre-war Poland, and in post-war theatre. Observing that “the root of our theatrical life is sound, despite the disasters of war and occupational hecatombs,” Borowy added: “for sure the talk of staging a [Shake-

¹ Wiktor Hahn (251–60) and Jan Ciechowski present a full documentation of the Festival. See also Krystyna Kujawińska Courtney, “Celebrating Shakespeare” (23–26).

² If not indicated otherwise, all translations are mine.

speare] play will soon begin in a theatrical milieu” (“W jakich przekładach” 27–28).³ His prediction came partially true. Not only did the Festival help rejuvenate Polish theatrical life, but also Polish cultural life in general.

Indeed, the Festival was a profound expression of human resilience, challenging, emboldening and igniting theatrical circles. Yet, at the same time, it also revealed the impoverished state of Polish culture after World War II. Throughout the war there were no Polish productions in the territories under German occupation where the anti-Polish politics of the Office of Racial Policy (*das Rassenpolitische Amt*) had been enforced since its creation on 23 November 1939.⁴ The Nazi policies were aimed at the cultural genocide of Slavs, including Poles. Places of learning and culture—universities, schools, libraries, museums, cinemas and theatres—were either closed or designated “Nur für Deutsche” (“Only for Germans”). Thousands of university professors, teachers, lawyers, artists, writers, priests and other members of the Polish intelligentsia were arrested and executed or transported to concentration camps. The reasoning behind the policy was clearly articulated by a Nazi Gauleiter (district governor): “In my district [any Pole] who shows signs of intelligence will be shot” (qtd. in Kujawińska Courtney, “In This Hour” 125).

Under the control of the German propaganda machinery, in some cinemas Polish people were allowed to see Nazi German movies, preceded by propaganda newsreels. The situation was even worse in theatres. Yet, the Polish Government in Exile in Great Britain created the Polish Underground State, an underground administration that operated in Poland throughout the war. It was the only political entity of this kind in the territories occupied by the Germans in Europe. Especially significant for the preservation of Polish culture was the role of the Department of Education and Culture, and the Department for the Elimination of the Effects of War.

Beginning in 1940, the underground theatres, namely in Warsaw and Cracow, were coordinated by the Secret Theatre Council. The underground actors (among them Karol Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II), many of whom had officially mundane day jobs, secretly presented poetry readings and performed plays written by Polish national artists. These activities were intended to preserve and sustain Polish culture and its national values, and to inspire resistance to a systematic anti-Polish policy that posed

³ Later that year Borowy published his evaluation of Shakespeare’s translations in Poland, and he continued this subject the following year (“Przekłady Shakespeare’a” 25).

⁴ For the theatrical activities of Poles outside the Polish territories occupied by the Nazis see Kujawińska Courtney, “In This Hour” (112–42).

the threat of total cultural annihilation. In his article “The Extermination of the Warsaw Theatres,” published in May 1946, Bohdan Korzeniewski described the state of Warsaw theatrical life in 1939 when there were 14 repertory theatres, one operetta and 4 musical houses. By 8 May 1946 none remained: during the course of the war approximately 84% of the city was destroyed due to German and Soviet mass bombings, heavy artillery fire, a planned demolition campaign, revolts, uprisings (Korzeniewski 36–41).

Yet the material destruction of the capital and of the majority of cities and towns in Poland did not destroy the nation’s spiritual endurance and vivacity, and Shakespeare was to become a part of the project to bring culture in Poland back to life. The acts and regulations prepared and published by the Secret Theatre Council during the war had a significant influence upon the post-war theatrical life: the Council also stressed the role of world dramaturgical classics, among them Shakespeare, in the revival of theatrical activities in Poland (Lambda 49–71).

The first announcement about this Festival appeared in *Gazeta Ludowa* (*People’s Newspaper*) created in 1945 as an official daily publication of PSL (traditionally translated as Polish Peasants’ Party).⁵ Both the newspaper and the party were treated as the centre of the anti-communist opposition, led by Stanisław Mikołajczyk, a Polish politician, who had been Prime Minister of the Polish government in exile during World War II, and later Deputy Prime Minister in post-war Poland, before the USSR took political control of Poland. Since the Shakespeare Festival was to demonstrate strong Polish affinity with Western European values, particularly with Great Britain, it was not surprising that Mikołajczyk’s newspaper was especially interested in its organization.⁶

The *Gazeta Ludowa* announcement of the Festival, which appeared as early as May 1946, gave a full report of the conference organized by the Ministry of Culture and the Arts during which the Shakespeare Festival was advertised. The news of the Festival, which was also to have an element of

⁵ The communists limited its circulation to circa 70,000 issues on a daily basis and 80,000 issues on holidays. Media specialists stress the modern layout of the newspaper: it had a supplement for women, pages devoted to literary and cultural news, and additional space for current social actions or anniversaries. *Gazeta Ludowa* was closed in autumn 1947, after Mikołajczyk’s escape to Great Britain when the election results were announced and Poland officially became a communist state.

⁶ After all, the Allied leaders, particularly Winston Churchill, tried to bring about a resumption talks between Mikołajczyk and Stalin, even at the time when it was obvious that the Soviet armed forces, not those of the Western Allies, would seize Poland from German occupation, and the Poles feared that Stalin intended both imposing Communism on Poland and annexing Poland’s eastern territories, which were populated by Poles, Ukrainians and Belarusians.

a theatrical contest, was enthusiastically received by all the Polish theatres. They quickly sent their Festival repertory to the Ministry. A detailed survey of the dates demonstrates that the theatres in a way pressed the Ministry to prepare the Festival regulations.

Although at the beginning of 1947 more and more articles appeared in the Polish press on the achievements of the Soviet theatre, and its Sovietization via Social Realism, Shakespeare unquestionably occupied a paramount position in the overall content of *Teatr*. This monthly periodical played a significant role both in promoting the Festival and in pressuring the Ministry to keep to its commitment to organize the important event. Each of its issues published from May 1946 to July 1947 contained articles devoted to the importance of Shakespeare in Polish culture (e.g., Rulikowski 3–15). Theatre specialists, as well as literary and culture critics, wrote about the international position of Shakespeare in the world civilization. Some presented critical analyses of his plays, others centred on the universality and modernity of his works.

The earliest Marxist approaches to his plays were of an elementary character. Bolesław Hajdukiewicz, for example, criticized Shakespeare's plays for their interest in bourgeois values at the expense of those belonging to lower social classes. Analyzing *Twelfth Night* from a modern Polish theatre-goer's point of view, the critic asked:

Should Viola . . . dreaming about turning herself into "a willow cabin" [at the lover's gate] to shut her soul there, need the aristocratic accoutrements for expressing her simple and honest love? (39)

Calling for socialist and democratic interpretations of his plays to make him even more appealing to the audience, Hajdukiewicz explains that, although Shakespeare is a product of his time, his significance is universal (38–43).

It was sheer luck that that the Festival and its preparation were in full swing between June 1946 and July 1947. If it had started later, the event would have been cancelled. In July 1946, a forged national plebiscite known as the "three times YES" referendum, was held, followed by elections in January 1947. The subsequent "miracle in the ballot boxes," which gave communists 80% of the vote, effectively ended multiparty Polish politics. Mikołajczyk, who would have likely become Prime Minister had the election been honest, immediately resigned from the government in protest. Facing arrest, he left the country in April.⁷

⁷ The popular tradition has it that Winston Churchill, upon seeing him in London, apparently remarked: "I am surprised you made it out alive." Yet, in London Polish

Although twenty three theatres initially expressed their participation in the Festival, ten resigned. The state of their ensembles (limited number of actors and actresses) and financial difficulties (scarce or no state subsidies) were given as the justification for their decision. Eventually only five theatres participated. They presented nine of Shakespeare's plays—three productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; two each of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing*; and one each of *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* (K. M. 22–24).

The choice of the plays is not surprising—nine comedies, one romance and only two tragedies. It is believed that *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which attracted the attention of three theatre companies, was so popular because it was relatively easy to present with a limited and even amateurish cast.⁸ Before the publication of Jan Kott's essay (1964), in which he demonstrated the submerged bestial instinct in the humans unleashed by the fairy world in this “most erotic of Shakespeare's plays” (Kott 248), the play was treated as a charming trifle full of gossamer and moonshine.

The Festival lasted for three months and seven days. It began on 23 April, the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, with the production of *The Taming of the Shrew* staged by the Polish Theatre in Bielsko-Biała, and it ended on 31 July 1947 with the presentation, in Warsaw, of *As You Like It* by the Teatr Wybrzeże from Gdynia. Over these three months the Jury of the Festival travelled to see the productions staged all over Poland. As a reporter of one of the opening nights wrote, the staging of a Shakespeare play:

... constituted a considerable challenge for the local theatre, whose staff consisted only of twenty people. To earn their living they had to tour the province, struggling with financial and material deprivation, and frequently with an ill will of various decision-makers and governing bodies. Despite their daily difficulties and mundane problems, the troupe showed an immense ardour, fervour and enthusiasm in their production. If this exhilarated atmosphere spreads all over Poland, the “Shakespeare fever” will bring forth blessed fruition. (J. K. 47)

government in exile regarded Mikołajczyk as a traitor for having co-operated with the Communists. He emigrated to the United States, where he died in 1966. In June 2000 his remains were returned for burial in Poland. His papers are in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University.

⁸ Its language is relatively simple, and the characters do not undergo significant moral transformations. Even a short survey of Shakespeare's plays on YouTube shows that it is one of his most popular plays to be performed at schools.

Each of these productions was turned into a celebratory and appropriately elevated event in the life of the locality. The plays were usually generally preceded by a series of speeches: firstly, by a representative of the Ministry of Culture and the Arts, and then by one of the Festival Jurors. Then the town's President, or another representative of the local self-government, not only welcomed the public and the distinguished guests, but also evaluated the current state of theatrical life in that locality, and gave provisional plans for its development in the future. An important part in the celebration was also played by the leader of the Trade Union, who, as a spokesman of the solidifying Communist regime, usually criticized the attitude of the pre-war Polish government to the theatrical system and promised assistance in promoting the theatrical artistic achievements in the future (J. K. 46–47).⁹

The Festival Jury officially awarded the actors and actresses, directors and set designers. There were also some distinctions for the ensemble acting. The prizes were funded by the Ministry of Culture and the Arts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Director of Polish Radio and the Publishing House "Czytelnik."

As Ciechowski deftly observes, the finale of the Festival, which took place in Warsaw's Polski Theatre, was of an elitist character: one ticket for a performance cost the equivalent of 2.5 kilos of sugar—a luxury at the time (18). Tyrone Guthrie, invited by the Ministry of Culture and the Arts to serve as an observer-expert at the Festival, stressed the "wonder" of the Shakespeare Festival despite the country's devastation. With a tight throat the famous British theatre critic narrated on BBC radio:

... the annihilation of Warsaw is so great, that it is impossible to describe it. Everywhere ruins. There are no streets. In deep valleys of debris one can see amorphous trails along which some droshkies move. Everywhere silence, only sometimes one can hear the voice of birds. (qtd. in Ciechowski 28)

The attitude of the anti-communists and communists to the 1947 Festival revealed itself in the press. Although its cultural value was generally noticed, especially the innovative nature of selected productions, journalists and theatre specialists lamented its deficient organization and unfortunate timing. "Vacation, summer holidays, the end of the season," as one critic wrote, "these were the reasons why the Festival, about which the whole of Poland should have been speaking, was only alluded to by a group

⁹ For a detailed description of the opening procedures of the Festival productions in the provinces see J. K. (47).

of the initiated” (qtd. in Fik 97). The relatively limited participation in the Warsaw finale of the Festival resulted, as Stanisław Marczak-Oborski indicated, from the exorbitant price of the tickets. While in Shakespeare’s time the lower classes filled his Globe theatre to the brim, in Warsaw “a regular student or worker could only see the gate and the flags,” which decorated the entrance of Polski Theatre/Teatr Polski (Marczak-Oborski 175).

In addition, a few months after the first national Shakespeare Theatre Festival, the Sovietization of Polish culture began with significant changes in theatre management introduced arbitrarily by the authorities. In June 1949 Social Realism (or, rather, Sovietization) was officially decreed the only accepted artistic style. In brief, over a two-year period the communists monopolized their political power in Poland and “it was not in their interest,” as Ciechowski notes, “to tolerate a long-lasting romance between Polish culture and Shakespeare and Elizabethan theatre” (12).

The titles of the journals that zealously published articles and reviews of Festival events indicate their political affinities. Quite an impressive number of articles appeared in the democratic (*Gazeta Ludowa*, *Robotnik*, *Odrodzenie*, *Teatr*) and the Catholic (*Tygodnik Powszechny*) press. At the same time Communist newspapers (e.g., *Kuźnica*) completely boycotted the event. To propagate “correct” values two years later, in 1949, the Ministry of Culture and the Arts organized the national Theatre Festival of Russian and Soviet Drama in which 47 theatres from all over Poland participated.¹⁰

Despite the fact that the Festival was generally evaluated as an important cultural event, no one classified it as an artistic achievement or phenomenon. Only one production demonstrated impressive dramaturgical innovativeness. This was Leon Schiller’s presentation of *The Tempest* staged by the Polish Army Theatre in Łódź. An advocate of Monumental Theatre, and of the use of Polish Romantic plays on the stage, Schiller, an Auschwitz survivor and a friend of Gordon Craig, turned his production of *The Tempest* into a landmark of East European theatre. He transformed it into a faux-naïf morality play with weird folk-art creatures, fusing fauna and flora. Prospero, as a Shakespeare-like artist and scientist on a set dominated by a giant easel, demonstrated how to fabricate a strange new world (Ciechowski 31–32 and Żurowski 83–85).

Schiller’s production was recognized by the Ministry of Culture and the Arts, though it did not receive the first place. The Jury gave rise to con-

¹⁰ The preparation for this Festival started at the end of 1947. In one of the first articles presenting the achievements of the Soviet theatre and its ideological influence upon the Polish stages, Leon Schiller stated: “it [the Soviet theatre] is the most accomplished mirror of life and it is the most sensitive nation’s instrument in the hands of the state” (36).

troversy; however, the verdict reflected the Festival's regulations, which stated that the "interpretation of the play should not deform the essence of [Shakespeare's] intention. This concerns any changes of the texts or adaptation" (Kotlarczyk 173).

The award for the first place went to the Wybrzeże Theatre, which staged *As You Like It*. Iwo Gall, its director, believed in creating an inspiring ensemble work, in which all actors and actresses, technicians and staff were equally involved. Following the Festival regulations, he combined elements of Elizabethan theatre with modern staging and design. It is possible that Gall's artistic policy, which was based on community-oriented theatre, influenced the Jury's decision. *As You Like It* was produced on a highly functional, revolving stage, which allowed for direct contact between the actors and the spectators (Ciechowski 34–37 and Puzyna 63).

The most significant result of the Shakespeare Festival was the survey of the theatrical life in Poland after World War II. It revealed the alarming number of eminent actors and actresses who had lost their lives in concentration camps, street roundups and military actions, but it also demonstrated the talent of young performers at the inception of their careers. The Festival also made it possible for a new generation of producers, directors, and specialists in lighting, makeup, costume, sets and sound, along with many others, to prove their skills and achieve recognition, both locally and nationally. It presented Shakespeare's works in various cities, towns and provincial settlements all over Poland, exposing citizens everywhere to the best the world classics could offer. In other words, by taking place in such a variety of urban and provincial localities, the Festival made Shakespeare's dramas widely available. In addition, it also proved the universal value of his works. Since great art is regarded as great only by surviving over the centuries, though usually for different reasons in each epoch, the Festival confirmed, reinforced and even monumentalized Shakespeare's greatness and place in Polish culture.

In his overview of the post-war European theatre, published in the first volume of *Shakespeare Survey* (1948), Guthrie underlined the significance of the Polish Festival for the international community. "Shakespeare's plays," the critic wrote, "have the quality of appealing more powerfully when the emotional spirit of a time or a land is more intense; his genius seems most to be appreciated when men's minds are stirred and life is uneasy." In his conclusion, the critic stated that the Polish Shakespeare Festival should be treated as "a symbol of this" (112).

In 1947 the Shakespeare Festival in Poland revealed the country's desire, despite impossible odds, to be identified with the values of the Western world, and it opened the door for turning Shakespeare into a powerful

weapon against the Communist system. Moreover, it established the uncontested position of Polish theatre in the international arena. In the ensuing years Shakespeare helped both preserve the historical merits of Polish culture and create a new culture that attempted to subvert Communist doctrine by engendering new aesthetics and discourses of power and ideological struggles (Kujawińska Courtney, “Krystyna Skuszanka’s Shakespeare” 228–45). In other words, the Communist doctrine was easier to impose than it was to apply, particularly when Shakespeare took an active role in the Cold War beginning in 1947.

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Shakespeare and the Demonization of Fairies

ABSTRACT

The article investigates the canonical plays of William Shakespeare—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*—in an attempt to determine the nature of Shakespeare's position on the early modern tendency to demonize fairy belief and to view fairies as merely a form of demonic manifestation. Fairy belief left its mark on all four plays, to a greater or lesser extent, and intertwined with the religious concerns of the period, it provides an important perspective on the problem of religion in Shakespeare's works. The article will attempt to establish whether Shakespeare subscribed to the tendency of viewing fairies as demonic agents, as epitomized by the *Daemonologie* of King James, or opposed it. Special emphasis will also be put on the conflation of fairies and Catholicism that one finds best exemplified in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*. The article draws on a wealth of recent scholarship on early modern fairies, bringing together historical reflection on the changing perception of the fairy figure, research into Shakespeare's attitude towards Catholicism and analyses of the many facets of anti-Catholic polemic emerging from early modern Protestant discourse.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, fairies, Protestant Reformation, Thomas Hobbes.

Gauging Shakespeare's stance on a particular issue or his allegiance to a given set of beliefs has long been a common practice in literary criticism. While in the days before the advent of modern literary studies asking such questions predictably involved an attempt to penetrate the mind of the Bard, in the post-new critical era many of them remain and elude ultimate critical pronouncements, now pertaining to the composite text of the Shakespearean canon rather than the man himself. One such question concerns Shakespeare's religious allegiances and his attitude towards tradition, whether understood in religious or cultural terms. This complex problematic may serve as a good example of the kind of goals Shakespearean scholarship sets itself, daunting in their complexity, yet potentially rewarding in directing focus both to the continuities and disruptive incongruities of the canon. The following article raises an issue that touches upon this particular problem without being explicitly subservient to it, inquiring, as it does, into Shakespeare's position with regard to the changing perception of fairies and the function of fairylore within early modern culture.

Hitherto relegated to the fringes of proper literary criticism,¹ fairyology—as the discipline is sometimes referred to²—is now emerging as a major interdisciplinary field of inquiry, reinvigorating the study of medieval romance and balladry, as well as early modern poetry and drama. With regard to the early modern period, one may distinguish studies that focus predominantly on the figurative uses of the fairy figure in literature in the social context³ and those that look towards broader historical change as the basic paradigm for understanding the invocations of fairylore in both literary and extraliterary sources.⁴ The latter school of criticism, even if it is more historical than properly literary in its scope, has a lot to offer the Shakespearean critic. Painting a vivid picture of a major reinterpretation of the figures of fairies, contiguous with the waning of the Middle Ages, and energized by the Protestant Reformation, historical criticism provides a rudimentary narrative of cultural change against which one can measure the more idiosyncratic, singular or outstanding phenomena emerging in the

¹ An overview of fairy references in Renaissance English literature can be found in Katharine Briggs's *Anatomy of Puck* (1959). For almost half a century this remained the only available introduction to the subject alongside M. W. Latham's even more dated *Elizabethan Fairies* (1930). It was only in the twenty-first century that studies of fairies in literature gained new momentum.

² See Henderson and Cowan (206). The word itself is a Victorian coinage.

³ A good example of this approach would be Marjorie Swann's argument that early modern fairy poetry "attempts to indigenize new forms of elite material display" (449) or Wendy Wall's analysis of how "class-specific elements of fairylore could be taken to represent household and national relations" in plays by Shakespeare (106).

⁴ See Purkiss (*At the Bottom*) and Hutton.

period, among them Shakespeare's canon, which not only reflects the zeitgeist of the era, but also transcends it in its literary complexity. The question which this article raises is whether some of the best-known plays by William Shakespeare attest and endorse the demonization of fairies, a cultural process historically known to be foundational for the evolution of both the popular and literate culture of early modern England. After outlining the nature of this change in the perception of fairies, the following analysis will first prove that Shakespeare's playwriting was not unaffected by it. Then it will attempt to establish whether his plays serve to propagate the new ideology or remain neutral or even conservative in this respect.

THE MORAL ALIGNMENT OF FAIRIES

Fairies in folk belief exemplify the liminal in a number of ways. Their moral alignment is liminally ambivalent, as illustrated in the popular ballad of "Thomas Rymer" that mentions three roads which lead to heaven, hell and Elfland respectively. The first two are predictably described in terms of the hardship or ease of the potential traveller who might want to take either of these paths, which is indicative of their moral significance, the good life being naturally more demanding than wickedness. But the third road is neither narrow (as the former) nor broad (as the latter)—and neither "thick beset with thorns and briers" (Child 324) nor misleading in that it presents itself as something other than it really is;⁵ it is simply a "bonny road" that leads to "fair Elfland" (324), the sheer aestheticism of the adjectival qualifications dismissing any moral considerations. The ballad survives in a version from the very end of the early modern period but is a reworking of the medieval romance of "Thomas of Erceldoune," where we find as many as five roads (Murray 12), the Elfland path being again neither one of those that lead to heaven or paradise nor one that leads to hell or other places of suffering. This testifies to the fact that fairies were traditionally seen as morally neutral, or, when interpreted through the lens of Christian dualism, as ambivalent in this respect, capable of both good and evil without essentially embodying either of these principles. Hence the green "alvisch mon" (elfish man) in the romance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight can be*—and many times has been—interpreted as an emissary of evil by some and a God-like figure by others.⁶ In general, whether they are literary critics or anthropologists, virtually all scholars agree that fairies are best under-

⁵ "That is the path to wickedness, / Tho some call it the road to heaven" (Child 324).

⁶ For the former view, see Stone. For the latter, see Morgan (152). Such contradictory opinions abound in the criticism of the romance.

stood through their liminality,⁷ and while there is a continuous tendency in European culture to present them as either demonic or angelic, the real nature of their moral alignment escapes the dualistic grid.

Fairies have thus always been seen as tricksters that could easily turn from being amicable to posing a real threat; they “seem to have hovered between these two extremes of the moral spectrum and possess the ability to change their moral stature as and when it suited them” (Wilby, *Cunning Folk* 113). This generated a number of customs aimed at appeasing the fairies, such as, for instance, leaving food for them in order to “promote a fairy’s shift towards beneficence” (114). What is important is that the pressure of the Christian moral paradigm to understand them in clear, black and white terms produced a particular history of the fairy figure and its cultural image—both at the elite and popular level—and from the late Middle Ages onwards a shift may be observed towards the demonic end of the spectrum. Henderson and Cowan place the beginning of the demonization of fairies in the fourteenth century, pointing out that one of the damning charges levelled against Joan of Arc was her familiarity with fairies (127). Significantly, the late Middle Ages is also a time when a similar process of demonization begins to affect the perception of magic and attitudes towards the so-called cunning folk, that is local practitioners of magic, leading in effect to the early modern witch-craze. The likelihood that these two processes are connected may be drawn from the sheer number of analogies between how European culture saw the figure of the witch and its image of the fairy:

There are several motifs familiar to both the fairy and the witch. The power to shape-shift or render oneself invisible; travelling through the air in a whirlwind or on straws or stalks; stealing food or taking the substance from foodstuffs; turning milk or butter bad and destroying crops; abducting children, sometimes replacing them with one of their own, or leaving a stock [fake body]; injuring horses and cattle by shooting them with elf-shot and witch-shot. The time of day or year, such as noon or midnight, May-eve, Midsummer-eve, Halloween, is when they are at their most active. . . . The circular impressions found in grass, often called fairy rings, are also associated with marks left by dancing witches. Both enjoy . . . dancing and feasting. Both have a fondness for indulging in houghmagandie, fairies preferring to take a mortal lover while witches endure sex with the Devil. . . . Paralysis, problems in childbirth, or sudden death, are frequently blamed on their intervention. (Henderson and Cowan 137)

⁷ See Henderson and Cowan (139–45) and Narváez *passim*. Cf. Buccola, *Fairies* 43–45.

The list could be expanded further, and there is a rich and growing literature on the intermingling of witchcraft and fairy belief in the early modern period.⁸ It lies beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the various historical conditions that may have led to the crafting of the witch figure in the late fifteenth century, and the subsequent early modern witch-panic, but the millenarian thinking emerging from the Reformation and the existential uncertainty arising out of the split in Christianity is often given as a major factor in fuelling witch persecutions (Johnstone 27–28), as well as the development of demonological scholarship in Europe from the medieval *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487) through Jean Bodin's influential *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1580) to the *Daemonologie* of King James VI of Scotland (1597). It therefore needs to be considered how the Reformation may also have affected the reinterpretation of fairy belief.

FAIRIES AND PROTESTANTS

Less than an hour's walk from Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh lies Calton Hill, a well-known landmark of the Scottish capital and a place with a rich history of fairy encounters.⁹ If he ever viewed the hill from his palace grounds, King James VI must have felt reasonably confident in his opinion as to the exact nature of the events which are said to have taken place there, for his *Daemonologie* leaves no doubt as to what stories of feasting with fairies inside such hills really signified. This was all a devilish illusion, he argued, and people who spread stories that

they have ben transported with the Phairie to such a hill, which opening, they went in, and there saw a faire Queene [and] [h]ow there was a King and Queene of Phairie, of such a jolly court & train as they had, how they had a teynd, & dutie, as it were . . . how they . . . went, eate and drank, and did all other actiones like naturall men and women (*Daemonologie* 74)

were simply deluded. For King James, fairies are simply one of the many manifestations of the Devil in the world, different only in appearance from the more demonic apparitions but essentially not different in kind from those

⁸ Excellent studies of the phenomenon in question can be found in two books by Emma Wilby: *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits* (2005) and *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie* (2010).

⁹ The most famous of these is the tale of the Boy of Leith. See Henderson and Cowan (64).

spirits that haunt particular places or afflict people with terror and madness (57). After all, asks King James,

may not the devil object to their fantasie, their senses being dulled, and as it were a sleepe, such hilles & houses within them, such glistering courtes and traines, and whatsoever such like wherewith he pleaseth to delude them[?] (74)

This was a somewhat extreme view, for, as Ronald Hutton observes, “those who classed fairies as demons pure and simple were rare enough almost to count as radical” (1150), but the persona of the author of the *Daemonologie* was surely enough to make this particular view impossible to ignore, at least in Scotland. Still, while James saw fairies and demons as one and the same, there were others, somewhat less extreme, who also “grouped fairies and devils together, but implied some difference in kind” (Hutton 1148).

The historical fact is that “between c. 1560 and c. 1700 . . . fairies came to be presented as agents of the Devil and all those who had traffic with them as co-conspirators in his grand plan to wreak havoc on good and godly citizens” (Henderson and Cowan 106).¹⁰ They feature extensively in Scottish witch-trial records as the witches’ familiars, cooperating with them and with the Devil in their acts of destruction, as in the case of Isobel Gowdie,¹¹ or even taking the Devil’s place, as in Andro Man’s graphic tale of a fairy sabbath during which he kissed the “airrs” of the fairy queen in adoration, in a similar manner to the demonic *osculum infame* (Henderson and Cowan 133). The reason for this sweeping change in the perception of fairies, is, according to Peter Marshall, that “[t]he Reformation’s emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God left no place for any such autonomous or semi-autonomous spiritual beings to exercise agency in the world” (140). As Marshall puts it, “[b]elief in fairies . . . was utterly incompatible with Reformed doctrine” (140); within the new paradigm, with no purgatory and no conception of moral neutrality, and in the face of the cosmic struggle between God and the Devil, “if what were traditionally thought

¹⁰ Wendy Wall presents the historical process mentioned here in the opposite way. Unlike all the other literary critics and historians, she claims that it was the medieval fairies that were “considered an arm of evil” (73) and that they mutated into the early modern playful pranksters. Wall provides no evidence to back up this controversial claim which goes against the grain of contemporary scholarship.

¹¹ See Wilby, *Visions* (43) for Gowdie’s original confession describing how elves produced arrows for the Devil which the witches would then use in their night-time killing sprees.

of as ghosts and fairies had any objective reality at all, they could only be demons, subservient to Satan, and bent on the spiritual destruction of mankind” (140). It was to a large extent the Reformed clergy who produced this major change in the understanding of fairies in early modern Britain (Marshall 148). The process was further aided by “the tendency among learned commentators to seek to link the fairies and elves of English folkloric belief with classical and pagan deities and spirits [which] reinforced the demonic association” (Marshall 148). Indeed, King James introduces his discussion of fairies in the *Daemonologie* by equating them with “Diana and her wandring court” (73).¹² All in all,

The objectives of the reformers were undoubtedly well-intended and sincerely inspired, but by reinventing a world where there could only be the forces of good, upheld by God, and the forces of evil, controlled by the Devil, they destroyed the grey area once inhabited by fairies, ghosts and witches, and relegated them all to the dominion of Satan, whose power appeared to be growing ever stronger. (Henderson and Cowan 116)

Some Reformers also had another agenda, which was not so much theological as political. Those who were inclined to question the reality of fairy encounters saw in them “the products of a deluded imagination” and “associate[d] the delusion with the superstitions and impostures of Catholicism” (Hutton 1150). According to this view, the Devil did not so much manifest himself in fairy forms, as inspired by the Catholic lies through which he incited the imagination of the common folk and provoked them to ritualistic—and hence quasi-Catholic—actions to ward off the fairy threat, as well as clouding their judgment: “It was, wrote the Jacobean demonologist Thomas Cooper, through ‘all these Conceits of Fairies etc.’ that ‘the Papists kept the ignorant in awe’” (Marshall 143). This is why King James is quick to add immediately after mentioning the court of Diana that this was an illusion “that was rifest in the time of Papistrie” (74). Keith Thomas refers to this rhetoric as “the Protestant myth that fairy-beliefs were an invention of the Catholic Middle Ages” (610). He explains, however, that even to the medieval clergy “it seemed that people who left out provision for the fairies in the hope of getting rich or gaining good fortune were virtually practising a rival religion” and that this hostile approach was, in fact, only “strengthened by the Reformation” (610).

¹² Wendy Wall sees this otherwise, arguing that as “[c]ountry fairylore blended into classical mythology . . . demonic spirits were rehabilitated and became less sinister” (74). As mentioned above, her article’s claims are on the whole questionable.

The Catholic connection is perhaps best exemplified in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, in which we find an elaborate list of analogies between the Catholic Church and the Kingdom of Fairies. Hobbes explains that the notion of fairies has been maintained "on purpose, either taught, or not confuted, to keep in credit the use of exorcism, of crosses, of holy water, and other such inventions of ghostly men" (14). A brief look at his juxtaposition of fairies and Catholic clergy suffices to understand his strategy:

The ecclesiastics take from young men the use of reason, by certain charms compounded of metaphysics, and miracles, and traditions, and abused Scripture, whereby they are good for nothing else, but to execute what they command them. The fairies likewise are said to take young children out of their cradles, and to change them into natural fools, which common people do therefore call elves, and are apt to mischief.

In what shop, or operatory the fairies make their enchantment, the old wives have not determined. But the operatories of the clergy, are well enough known to be the universities, that received their discipline from authority pontifical.

When the fairies are displeased with anybody, they are said to send their elves, to pinch them. The ecclesiastics, when they are displeased with any civil state, make also their elves, that is, superstitious, enchanted subjects, to pinch their princes, by preaching sedition; or one prince enchanted with promises, to pinch another.

The fairies marry not; but there be amongst them incubi, that have copulation with flesh and blood. The priests also marry not. (464)

Hobbes never finishes the last sentence, leaving it to the reader's imagination to bring the analogy to its logical fruition. This cleverly constructed political satire dismisses fairy belief, presenting it as a mere sham, a cultural and political subterfuge that serves to maintain the hold of Catholic heresies over the minds of the ignorant. Its importance for understanding the demonization of fairies lies in the fact that it associates fairies with Catholicism without apparently taking their existence seriously. Hobbes viewed fairy belief as mere ignorance, seriously detrimental in obscuring judgment and turning people away from what he saw as the true faith, not demonic in the sense of genuinely involving supernatural agents of evil or warranting the use of exorcism but more as the spread of proper education in the matter:

To this, and such like resemblances between the papacy, and the kingdom of fairies, may be added this, that as the fairies have no existence, but in the fancies of ignorant people, rising from the traditions of old wives, or old poets: so the spiritual power of the Pope (without the bounds of his own civil dominion) consisteth only in the fear that seduced people stand in, of their excommunication; upon hearing of false miracles, false traditions, and false interpretations of the Scripture. (464)

202 Even without this paragraph, which settles the problem for good, it would indeed be difficult to reconcile this kind of rhetoric, which conflates the Catholic clergy and fairies, with the possibility that fairies were actually real. Chaucer pushes a similar point in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” where the idea that friars have supplanted fairies in their erotic countryside escapades similarly serves only to mock the former and implies the purely superstitious nature of belief in the latter.

It is evident that Hobbes did not share the views of zealots like King James, even if the *Leviathan* could easily lend itself to the latter’s belligerent rhetoric with its mention that fairies “have but one universal king, which some poets of ours call King Oberon, but the Scripture calls Beelzebub” (463). King James may have believed fairies to be illusions. But the illusions which he viewed were alarmingly real and hellish in origin. In fact, it was his conviction of the reality of human-fairy—and thus, in his opinion, human-demon—interactions that prompted King James to take the extreme stance he adopted and to include a section about fairies in a treatise otherwise devoted to what was believed to be the most common type of interactions people had with the Devil, that is witchcraft. One may therefore conclude that a full-blown position endorsing the demonization of fairies, as exemplified by King James VI, would have precluded scepticism towards an actual supernatural agency working in the world and should consequently be at odds with the more satire-oriented rhetoric of conflating fairies and Catholics (while admittedly allowing for positing some sort of link between them). This observation will later prove pertinent in the discussion of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

The degree of belief in the actuality of fairies among the Reformed clergy, and the literate elite in general, and their willingness to dismiss as superstition the finer details of tales of fairy encounters but not the idea that they were indicative of the supernatural forces at play, is quite striking. It would appear that such demonization caught on among those members of the elite who did not exhibit much scepticism in this respect in the first place. Significantly, the possible ways in which popular culture affected the mind-view of the elite have been noted by historians. Peter Marshall points

out that while “[t]he dynamic that we would expect to observe is . . . one of aggressively top-down acculturation” (140),

the trial evidence gives us an impression that, to some extent at least, fairy beliefs were being subsumed into witch beliefs, and the serious attention that inquisitors were giving to familiars by the end of the Tudor period suggests that this cultural traffic was not merely one-way. (150)

Popular culture seamlessly fed into the scholarly and bookish paradigm of the elite and *vice versa*, producing the curious mixture of folk belief and learned demonology that we know from early modern British witchcraft records.¹³

One may object to stressing the actuality of belief in fairies in the seventeenth century, for, as has been mentioned above, we already find in Chaucer the conviction that this belief is a thing of the past. There is also the often-quoted list of supernatural creatures by Reginald Scot from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) taken from old wives’ tales that he and his peers were nurtured on in their childhood:

Our mothers’ maids have so frayed us with Bull-beggars, Spirits, Witches, Urchins, Elves, Hags, Faeries, Satyrs, Pans, Faunes, Syl[v]ens, Kit-with-the-Canstick, Tritons, Centaurs, Gyants, Impes, Calcars, Conjurors, Nymphs, Changelings, Incubus, Robin Goodfellow, the Spoorne, the Mare, the Man-in-the-Oak, the Hell-wain, the Firedrake, the Puckle, Tom-thombe, Hobgoblin, tom-tumbler, Boneless, and other such Bugs, that we are afraid of our shadow. (qtd. in Lamb 46)

The point that Scot makes in this book is that just as no reasonable gentleman can take beliefs in these beings seriously, so would witchcraft one day be viewed as mere superstition. He thus invokes fairies by way of example as a notion obviously false and not to be entertained by reasonable men. But then, as Keith Thomas notes, a hundred years later, “in the late seventeenth century Sir William Temple could assume that fairy beliefs had only declined in the previous thirty years or so” (607). Diane Purkiss makes sense of these conflicting statements by arguing that “Fairy-beliefs were a sign of an outmoded structure of belief, *always already* on the point of disappearing, and hence associated, like folktales,

¹³ Wilby’s *Visions of Isobel Gowdie* provides the most comprehensive scholarly account of the many ways in which popular fairy beliefs and elite demonology could interact and become intertwined in the early modern period.

with elderly, uneducated women”¹⁴ (*The Witch* 159). One may add that this has not changed at all, as attested by Margaret Bennett’s study on fairy belief in the Scottish village of Balquhiddy in the 1990s that mentions adults relegating fairy belief to the realm of children’s tales and seeing it as obviously doomed to die out, with the children happily carrying on the tradition of believing, though (94–113). Thus, even if for many, then just as now, the idea of fairies seemed childish and not worthy of being taken seriously, “the *Shepherds Calender* of 1579, for example, admitted that ‘the opinion of Faeries and elfes is very old and yet sticketh very religiously in the mindes of some’” (Marshall 144). While it has been noted in sociological fairy research that a community need not necessarily embrace fairy belief in full to interpret real-life events and construct social meaning with its help (cf. Lamb 39–43), it would appear that among those who genuinely did believe, the proponents of the demonization of fairies were a particularly prominent group.

THE FAIRIES OF SHAKESPEARE

Turning now to Shakespeare, the following argument will first illustrate how Shakespeare’s plays are marked by the demonization of fairies before attempting to analyze their position with regard to the process. Two different yet complementary examples from *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* leave no doubt as to Shakespeare’s awareness of the demonic associations of fairies. In the first scene of the former we find Marcellus commenting on the disappearance of old Hamlet’s ghost:

It faded on the crowing of the cock.
 Some say that ever ’gainst that season comes
 Wherein our Saviour’s birth is celebrated,
 The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
 And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad,
 The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
 No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
 So hallow’d and so gracious is that time. (1.1.162–69)

Fairies and witches are mentioned together, in the same line, as representatives of the forces of evil that are cast away by the rays of the rising sun. Being “taken” by fairies most likely pertains to changelings, that is fairy replacements left behind in the place of stolen children, and need not

¹⁴ Emphasis mine.

in itself be necessarily seen as demonic, but rather emblematic of the fairies' power to interfere with human lives, sometimes to people's benefit and sometimes, as here, to their detriment.¹⁵ However, the line effects a reinterpretation of this traditional folk motif by presenting it on a par with the witches' charms. One may conclude that Marcellus subscribes to the early modern, demonized way of viewing the fairies.

Shakespeare's own stance on the issue is of course more difficult to determine, but the *Midsummer Night* fairies are definitely not what Marcellus would make of them. In Act 3, when Puck reminds Oberon that they need to hasten about their business for the sun is about to rise, the latter makes a statement that cannot be read as anything other than a disclaimer, one that makes it clear to anyone in the audience that has not yet grasped the convention of the play that its fairies are no demons:

PUCK

My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,
 For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
 And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger;
 At whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there,
 Troop home to churchyards. Damned spirits all,
 That in crossways and floods have burial,
 Already to their wormy beds are gone.
 For fear lest day should look their shames upon,
 They wilfully themselves exile from light,
 And must for aye consort with black-browed night.

OBERON

But we are spirits of another sort.
 I with the morning's love have oft made sport,
 And, like a forester, the groves may tread,
 Even till the eastern gate, all fiery-red,
 Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
 Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.
 But notwithstanding, haste; make no delay;
 We may effect this business yet ere day. (3.2.378–95)

There is nothing in the plot of the play or the events preceding and following this scene that would require such a disclaimer, and it seems that the

¹⁵ The Arden edition of *Hamlet* explains that "taken" is to be read as bewitched and being stricken by disease, which would suggest an even greater degree of demonization in the passage (177).

rationale behind it was to assuage the concerns the audience brought with them into the playhouse and to justify the actions of the characters on the stage. It would appear that what necessitated it was not the aesthetic or structural demands of the play itself but the audience's default interpretation of fairies as agents of evil which was at odds with the performance and required some kind of reconciliation with what was going on onstage. It served not only to allay the concerns of those who took fairies and their evil provenance seriously—possibly a minority group—but also to explain to all the others that, unusual as it may seem, these particular fairies were quite happy to work their mischief in daylight.

These two examples indicate that Shakespeare was well aware of the demonic interpretation of fairies. Apart from Marcellus, however, one is hard-pressed to find a character in his works (in particular a fairy character) that might be seen as endorsing this reading of fairies. In *The Tempest*, for instance, Prospero seems to work his magic in close cooperation with a whole array of nameless elves, which we only learn about from an apostrophe in which he addresses them directly:

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves,
 And ye that on the sands with printless foot
 Do chase the ebbing Neptune and do fly him
 When he comes back; you demi-puppets that
 By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,
 Whereof the ewe not bites; and you whose pastime
 Is to make midnight-mushrooms, that rejoice
 To hear the solemn curfew; by whose aid—
 Weak masters though ye be—I have bedimmed
 The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
 And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
 Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder
 Have I given fire and rifted Jove's stout oak
 With his own bolt: the strong-based promontory
 Have I made shake and by the spurs plucked up
 The pine and cedar; graves at my command
 Have waked their sleepers, ope'd, and let 'em forth
 By my so potent art. But this rough magic
 I here abjure . . . (5.1.33–51)

There is an interesting caesura in the middle of this address. After presenting the elves' activities in an idyllic way, Prospero moves on to describe his own actions, and these are far more destructive and alarming than any of the images invoked earlier. But at the same time, even if this speech

leads us to the act of abjuring magic on Prospero's part, it is highly suggestive of an evil underside to his magic since it vindicates the elves. The use of pronouns in the passage changes quite dramatically in the middle of the apostrophe, alongside the imagery. Moreover, the sudden shift from "ye" to "I" suggests that whatever evil lay in Prospero's spells, its source was the mage and his will, and not the magical energies of the island that he tapped into. If anything is demonized here, it is the human will to control, and not the elemental forces embodied and represented by the elves.

Shakespeare's strategy in *Macbeth* is different but also difficult to classify as demonization. In the chronicle of Raphael Holinshed on which the play is based we read about Macbeth and Banquo's encounter with three "goddesses of destiny, or else some nymphs or fairies" (Holinshed 143), and there is no mention of any witches here, although the chronicle is no stranger to the notion, as it speaks of witches elsewhere, in its story of King Duff's curse (Shamas 11). Laura Shamas points out, that as late as 1611, "in the description of the production of *Macbeth* at the Globe . . . they were listed as fairies or nymphs" (11). On the other hand, the First Folio consistently calls them witches. Still, any references made outside the actual performance were of little or no relevance to the audiences, which could recognize in the on-stage characterization of the three sisters a number of elements clearly identifying them as proper witches and nothing to suggest they were fairies. Communal activity around the cauldron accompanied by thunder and lightning¹⁶ and the hag-like appearance of the three women lent themselves easily to such interpretations, even if in the dialogue the characters are usually referred to as "weird sisters," the word "witch" being mentioned only once (1.3.6). With no trace of fairies or fairy-references—with one significant exception—in the actual text of the play it is difficult to argue that fairies are demonized in the text. For that to happen they would actually have to feature there, and they are only mentioned when Hecate tells the Weird Sisters: "And now about the cauldron sing / Like elves and fairies in a ring" (4.1.41–42).¹⁷ Diane Purkiss sees in these lines "sheer banality" dissolved in "the joint infantilisation of octosyllabic couplets and the supernatural" (*The Witch* 214). This relegates the witches to where the fairies belonged—the world of childhood and its games, a realm of "dramatic imagination" (214). The implication of this comparison is significant, for it is the witches that are

¹⁶ See Zika (70–98).

¹⁷ The passage was singled out by A. C. Bradley as a potential interpolation (437). The debate as to whether the lines originated from Shakespeare or were a later addition taken from Middleton's play *The Witch* is still highly contentious and the issue is far from being resolved (cf. Taylor *passim*).

compared with fairies, and not the other way round. The subversive potential of the fragment lies thus not so much in effecting a demonization of fairies but rather in a partial de-demonization of the witch-figure produced by enmeshing the latter in the bugbear-stylistics captured so well by Reginald Scot's famous lines about the Elizabethans' fictional childhood terrors.

SHAKESPEARE'S FAIRIES AND CATHOLICISM

One may find scattered references to fairies in many plays by Shakespeare¹⁸—but there are only two works in the entire canon that make extensive use of fairy belief in their plots, and these are *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The latter is of little help in discussing the demonization of fairy belief, for it only features counterfeit fairies, that is people pretending to be elves in order to play a practical joke on Falstaff. The pranksters' efforts and Falstaff's credulity couple in a powerful scene in which Sir John finds himself in danger of being pinched by the fairies—a classic element of popular belief that the play invokes—but there is nothing alarming here, for it is perfectly clear to the audience that the characters impersonate fairies precisely due to the popular perception of the latter as playful tricksters. Although the problem of religion may not strike one as critical in the interpretation of the play and its allusions to the supernatural world, Regina Buccola identifies an interesting link between the play's use of fairies and Catholicism:

One of the ways in which Reform Christians attacked Catholicism in early modern England was to feminize it. Protestants did away with the Catholic significance attached to Mary, the saints (many of whom were women), the religious sisterhood, and scoffed at the elaborate ostentation of the Catholic mass (with its emphasis on ritual ornamentation and display). In relegating all of these female figures or elements such as costuming and "decoration," which were negatively linked to women in the culture at large, to Catholicism, Reform Christians in effect feminized the entire religion. The connection forged between fairy belief and Catholicism simply reinforced this trend, as fairies were associated with women, their domestic work, and stereotyped images of their physique and moral vicissitudes. ("Shakespeare's Fairy Dance" 169)

¹⁸ Mentions of fairies—usually of no consequence for the plot of the given play—can also be found in *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Cymbeline*, *Henry IV Part I*, *King Lear*, *Pericles*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Winter's Tale*.

Buccola traces the ways in which the play feminizes the character of the parson, Sir Hugh Evans. She argues that “Shakespeare invokes the three-headed hydra of religious controversies in depicting a Welsh parson as a stage manager of a troop of child-actor fairies,” pointing out that the country of Wales, the world of theatre and the space of Fairyland were “three locales that had proved resistant to conquest by Reform Christianity at the time of his writing” (170). In this way *The Merry Wives of Windsor* may be seen as making a statement about the relationship between religion and fairy belief, yet not directly in the context of the demonization of the latter.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream delves deeper into the relationship between Catholicism and fairies, for it conflates the two words. The last thing that happens in the play, just before Puck’s epilogue, is that Oberon commands the fairies to consecrate the Athenian palace with dew in a way that resembles Catholic rituals involving holy water:

Now, until the break of day
 Through this house each fairy stray.
 To the best bride-bed will we,
 Which by us shall blessed be;
 And the issue there create
 Ever shall be fortunate.
 So shall all the couples three
 Ever true in loving be,
 And the blots of Nature’s hand
 Shall not in their issue stand.
 Never mole, hare lip, nor scar,
 Nor mark prodigious, such as are
 Despised in nativity,
 Shall upon their children be.
 With this field-dew consecrate,
 Every fairy take his gait,
 And each several chamber bless,
 Through this palace, with sweet peace;
 And the owner of it blest
 Ever shall in safety rest. (5.1.379–98)

Oberon’s fairies consecrate the best bridal-bed—presumably that of Theseus and Hippolyta—as well as several chambers of the palace. Even leaving the demonization of fairies aside, the blessing effected in this way strikes one as ambivalent, given the fairies’ proclivity for playing with human offspring:

Certainly, the ambivalence in the fairies' blessing is striking. It is intended to bring about marital happiness and prevent birth defects in the married couples' offspring—the reverse, in fact, of what was normally ascribed to faery intervention—but the word “stray” is jarringly pejorative, showing that Shakespeare does not treat Catholic nostalgia in an unequivocally positive manner. (Shell 91)

Alison Shell argues that the use of the word “stray” engages the religious rhetoric of “anti-Catholic polemic” (92) and plays with the idea of doctrinal delusion; she points to passages in the play where Puck is presented as the one who “mislead[s] night-wanderers” (2.1.39) and leads people astray (3.2.358). Shell argues that the experience of the lovers who are lost in the woods, and are prompted to follow certain paths for the duration of the night by the mischievous Puck recalls the folk belief of “being pixy-led” (92). This can be read both literally and metaphorically, the latter reading suggesting that fairies lead people astray, just like agents of Catholicism. The power of the metaphor is fuelled by the contemporary understanding of being pixy-led, which has nothing to do with the romantic wandering that modern readers may wish to read into the notion:¹⁹

Being pixy-led could simply refer to losing one's way and wandering in circles, but it was also invoked in relation to the phenomenon of ignes fatui: methane gases, especially common in marshy areas, which had a misleading resemblance to lanterns. Under this and other names—Will-o'-the-Wisp, Jack O'Lantern—they were a real danger for the early modern traveler. (Shell 92)

A similar picture of fairies producing confusion emerges from *The Tempest*, where the fairy-like Ariel, following the orders of the Italian—and thus presumably Catholic—Duke Prospero sends the shipwreck party on a troublesome errand around the island with his enticing music.

The presentation of fairies in the act of performing Catholic rituals may be read as a form of satire, perhaps milder but not unlike that of Thomas Hobbes. This would imply that the fairies we find in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are not to be taken too seriously. Putting together Catholicism and fairy magic is difficult as a defence to the former, and one must agree with Alison Shell that “any writer who wanted to endorse the old religion through

¹⁹ As in matters cited above, Wendy Wall disagrees and sees “fooling travelers” as indication of the non-demonic, playful and innocent perception of fairies in the period (73).

imaginative reworking would have been wary of associating it with fairies” (91). Yet, at the same time, any writer who wanted to attack the old religion would not have associated it with such fairies as those which we find in the play. It would appear that Shakespeare attempted neither, and it is hard to find in this play, or any other, a clear religious agenda involving fairies. The light-hearted, non-demonic approach that informs these plays makes it difficult to argue that Shakespeare took fairy belief seriously, but it is not right to question whether Shakespeare or his audiences actually believed in fairies. The fact is these supernatural beings were part and parcel of early modern culture. They were grounded in a set of popular beliefs whose key elements were shared by the common people and the elite, even if some among the latter read it in their own, Reformed and demonized way whilst also disseminating this view. The comic plots of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Tempest* provide conciliatory denouements that dismiss any extremist reading of their fairy figures. The actions of fairies, in turn, can be read in all sorts of ways, but the common denominators of them all are the notions of playfulness and trickery, as well as the fairies’ tendency to interfere with human affairs—the most basic and common elements of fairyllore. These are quite independent from their religious interpretations and are unaffected by the processes of demonization. Ultimately, the joke is on those who wish to find in Shakespeare either a clear endorsement of Catholicism or the embracement of Protestantism. The fairies of Shakespeare lead readers astray, especially those who enter the world of his plays with fixed preconceptions about the reality of fairies and their demonic nature.

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Wawel Meets Elsinore.
The National and Universal Aspects
of Stanisław Wyspiański's Vision
of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to show the role, the possibilities and the limits of Wyspiański's national thinking through Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Of particular importance, in this context, is the role the Ghost takes in Wyspiański's celebrated interpretation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. By the Ghost we mean the spirit of history, the ghost of a father, the spirit of the fatherland, the voice of the ancestors, and particularly that of the Polish king Casimir the Great, as well as the Holy Ghost and the Evil Spirit because all these aspects of the Ghost belong to Wyspiański's vision. The play in question bears witness to what the Polish poet calls "the truth of other worlds," as well as the truth of the theatre, which Wyspiański calls the labyrinth. The poet manages to reduce, to some extent, this difficult truth to the truth of the world he cared most about, that is the present and historical reality of Poland, more specifically the city of Cracow, known as Poland's spiritual, that is "ghostly," and only virtual, capital. It is also remarkable that Wyspiański saw the Ghost in *Hamlet* in the context of other Shakespearean ghosts, apparitions and magicians, such as those that appear in *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Richard III*. At the same time, Wyspiański realizes that the Ghost, with its irrationalism, offends the spirit of post-medieval times, and as such, is understandably neglected by Hamlet, who for Wyspiański, in anticipation of Harold Bloom, stands for modernity.

Keywords: Hamlet, Wyspiański, Shakespeare, the dilemmas of nationalism, old-fashioned heroism vs. modernity.

I

'Tis dangerous when the base nature comes
 Between the pass and fell incensed points
 Of mighty opposites.
 (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.2.60–62)

Wyspiański's study of *Hamlet* is a mixture of critical essay, poetic prose and the author's own translation of selected passages from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The translation used is based on another Polish translation by Józef Paszkowski because Wyspiański did not know English.¹ Finally, Wyspiański's fantastic vision of *Hamlet* is not as Shakespeare wrote it, but as Wyspiański would have written it had he been Shakespeare, or perhaps as Shakespeare would have written it had he been Wyspiański. In this paper, I am going to take into account not only a study of *Hamlet*, but also some of Wyspiański's plays, particularly *Wyzwolenie* (*Liberation*) where the influence of Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is very much in evidence.

Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907), a poet, a playwright, a painter, an architect and a critic is sometimes called Poland's Fourth National Bard. The earlier Three Bards, that is Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809–49) and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–59) were all great Romantic poets who form a peculiar group, the conception of which is clearly based on the religious idea of the Holy Trinity. This can also be borne out by their use of lofty and religious, or quasi-religious, rhetoric. They belonged to more or less the same generation, they knew each other well, and they lived mainly in Paris, as members of the so-called Great Emigration. Wyspiański, unlike them, never emigrated² and spent almost his whole life in Cracow (Kraków), the old capital of Poland, which was then under Austrian rule.

The title page of the first edition of Wyspiański's study (Kraków, 1905) looks somewhat bizarre. It includes the title of *Hamlet* in English, in fact a facsimile of the title of the First Quarto edition of *Hamlet* (1603), that is: "The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke by William Shake-speare." This is followed by a subtitle in Polish, which

¹ He states this very emphatically when explaining why he rephrases Paszkowski's translation, instead of basing it on the original: "Since I cannot speak English and English is alien to me" (see Wyspiański, *Hamlet* 177). But it should be remembered that Wyspiański was a good linguist and spoke fluent French and German. The translation of certain passages from books originally written in Polish was done by me throughout this paper.

² Wyspiański, however, was also, in a sense, a Parisian, he visited Paris four times between 1890 and 1894. He spent several months there, fell in love with that city and often felt nostalgic about it in his later years.

in an English translation reads: “According to the Polish text by Józef Paszkowski, freshly read and thought over by Stanisław Wyspiański.” Prospective readers may become confused as to whether they have Wyspiański’s or Shakespeare’s text, and this confusion will not be entirely dispelled. It is often said that this study addresses the problem of the essence of theatre, or contains the author’s original and innovative conception of the theatre. On the other side of the title page, we indeed find an epigraph dedicated to Polish actors. It goes more or less like this:

To the Polish actors, to the characters acting on the stage on their way through the labyrinth known as the theatre, whose destiny was and is to hold the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and spirit of the time their form and pressure. (Wyspiański, *Hamlet* 3)

Part of it is of course a quotation from Hamlet’s speech to the Players (3.2.20–23)³ on the nature of theatre and the actors’ art.⁴ It is worth noting that Wyspiański does not include this part of his dedication as a quotation, and treats Shakespeare’s text as something that he can freely link to his own text. This is indicative of Wyspiański’s somewhat cavalier attitude towards Shakespeare’s masterpiece. It is clear that Wyspiański is not interested in interpreting Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, but rather in appropriating Hamlet for his purposes. This can be seen in a somewhat mysterious statement from the book in question: “In Poland the mystery of Hamlet is the following: what in Poland is there to think about [co jest w Polsce—do myślenia]” (101). The meaning seems to be that Hamlet is there to allow Poles, and first of all Wyspiański himself, as a self-styled spokesman for the then non-existing Poland, to think again, and think in a better way, about Poland. So we should not be surprised that Wyspiański envisions, at some point, his Hamlet appearing on the

³ This is based on William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Bernard Lott, Harlow: Longman, 1968.

⁴ While translating this dedication I introduced two significant changes into the English of Shakespeare. Instead of writing “whose end” I wrote “whose destiny,” and instead of “age and body of the time” I wrote “age and spirit of the time.” Such changes are justified, I hope, by the fact that Wyspiański uses Paszkowski’s translation in which “end” is indeed translated by the Polish word denoting “destiny” and “body” is translated as “spirit.” The Polish text is as follows: “Aktorom polskim, osobom działającym na scenie, na drodze przez labirynt zwany teatr, którego przeznaczeniem, jak dawniej, tak i teraz, było i jest służyć niejako za zwierciadło naturze, pokazywać nocnie własne jej rysy, złości żyw jej obraz, a światu i duchowi wieku, postać ich i piętno.”

fortifications of the Wawel Castle in Cracow, Wyspiański's native city, rather than on those of Elsinore in Denmark.

In the dedication in question, Wyspiański calls theatre "labyrinth," which is his own concept not indebted directly to Shakespeare, but presented as if it were at least compatible with Shakespeare's thinking about theatre. Concerning the motif of the labyrinth we may read:

The Labyrinth "Is truly a tool for transformation, a crucible for change, a blueprint for the sacred meeting of the psyche and the soul, a field of light, a cosmic dance, it is a center for empowering ritual." (Artress)

Perhaps Wyspiański was right to link the idea of the theatre with the idea of the labyrinth, especially if we think of a labyrinth not so much as an architectonic construction, but rather as a ritual, mystical dance.⁵ Indeed there is something that could be seen as a dancelike movement in Shakespeare's thinking about the theatre. He (or rather Hamlet) wants the actors' speech to be spoken "trippingly on the tongue" (3.2.2), that is lightly. He warns the actors against excessive emphasis, admonishes them to "use all gently" (3.2.5), but a moment later, he says "Be not too tame neither" (3.2.16). A certain precarious equilibrium between the opposing forces is postulated and expressed in the formula: "suit the action to the word, the word to the action" (3.2.17).

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II

The theme of the theatre, as well as the distinction between "the old" and "the new theatre" make Wyspiański's Hamlet unique—especially if one recollects one of his last plays entitled *Wyzwolenie* (*Liberation*) (1902). This parallel was recognized by Maria Prussak:

Particularly similar to *Hamlet* is *Wyzwolenie* (*Liberation*), which also tackles the problem of the function of the theatre, the problem of the actor's attitude, and unmasks the "old theatre," which is "old," because it is schematic, that is false. *Hamlet* is also a commentary on the poet's own work. (Wyspiański, *Hamlet* xxiii)⁶

⁵ See Mahiques. Also Robert Graves in his *The Greek Myths* talks about the connection between a labyrinth and an ancient dance (346–47).

⁶ The Polish text is as follows: "Najbardziej do *Hamleta* zbliża się *Wyzwolenie*, również podejmujące problem roli teatru, postawy autora, demaskujące 'stary teatr,' który jest stary, bo schematyczny, więc fałszywy. Jest natomiast *Hamlet* również komentarzem do własnej twórczości poety."

It is remarkable in the above quotation that the term *Hamlet* is used in reference to Wyspiański's *Hamlet*, and not Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Yet there are echoes in *Wyzwolenie* of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Shakespeare as such, too. *Wyzwolenie* is a strange, palimpsestic play with virtually no plot. It is focused on patriotic matters, and on the idea of liberation as its title suggests. However, it refers not simply to the political liberation of the Polish nation. The main character is called Konrad, which is an obvious allusion to Mickiewicz's play *Dziady* (*The Forefathers' Eve*), particularly its Third Part, in which the protagonist, also named Konrad, represents Poland's aspiration for independence. Konrad is prepared to rebel against God who is seen as the guarantor of the existing, oppressive order.

Wyspiański's Konrad also has some features of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. At the end of the play, the following dialogue between Konrad and the characters called Old Actor and Director takes place.

KONRAD: So it's you, the actors?
 Yes, it's all pretence.
 OLD ACTOR: Yes, it is.
 DIRECTOR: A moment of illusion.
 Now laurels will reward our fictitious toils.
 Good night.
 KONRAD: In a thought a spark that can start a fire is born!
 Good night, my friends.
 OLD ACTOR: Good night, my prince!
 KONRAD: A theatrical spectacle—look at it, Horatio:
 do you know who the theatre is for?; —a mousetrap.
 They will reveal themselves: villains and blackguards.
 Their conscience will gnaw at them, a blush will betray them.
 Let us rejoice, Horatio! (Wyspiański, *Dzieła zebrane* t. 5 175)⁷

⁷ The Polish text is as follows:
 "KONRAD Ach, to wy aktry! —
 Tak—to wszystko udanie—
 STARY AKTOR Tak jest.
 REŻYSER Chwila złudy.
 Teraz wieńce nagrodzą nam fikcyjne trudy.
 Dobranoc.
 KONRAD W myśli iskra pożaru się łąże!
 Dobranoc, przyjaciele.
 STARY AKTOR Dobranoc, mój księżę!
 KONRAD Sceniczne widowisko—patrzaj się, Horacy:
 wieszli, dla kogo teatr?: —pułapka na myszy.
 Oni sami się wskażą: nikczemni i podli.

Here Wyspiański gives an explanation, and it is a perfectly Shakespearian one, of the term “labyrinth,” which is used in the dedication to his study on Hamlet. The labyrinth is indeed first of all a trap from which it is difficult, or impossible, to escape. The classical labyrinth, in the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, was used to cage a monster, whereas Hamlet’s “mouse-trap,” that is a play within the play, doctored and directed by Hamlet, is supposed to provoke a seemingly respectable and admirable character, that is the king, to reveal himself as a moral monster. Wyspiański probably had in mind those who might be called “political monsters,” that is traitors and people who cooperated with the so-called partitioning powers, that is Russia, Germany (formerly known as Prussia) and Austria (formerly known as Austria-Hungary). The innovative conception of the theatre, which Wyspiański put forward, included, it seems, the use of theatre for political purposes of which Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, in a sense, gives an example.

But, the term “labyrinth” is also explicitly used in *Wyzwolenie*, and it appears in the context of the story of Theseus and Minotaur:

MASK 7: Thread?

KONRAD: Ariadne’s thread.

MASK 7: Leading to the labyrinth.

KONRAD: No, the one that can be used, as you hold it and gradually unwind it from a ball, to penetrate into the secrets of the labyrinth, and reach the remotest passages of the palace. The ones in the upper floors, the underground, the tunnels dug under its walls, and the paths on the vertiginous uplands of the roofs.

MASK 7: What do we mean by the Labyrinth?

KONRAD: Wawel.

MASK 7: And what about Ariadne?

KONRAD: It is pride,

MASK 7: And the ball of thread?

KONRAD: It is love for what is . . .

MASK 7: There?

KONRAD: No, inside myself.

MASK 7: Ah?

KONRAD: And the thing that propels me and leads me.

MASK 7: ?

KONRAD: Is the hatred towards WHAT IS THERE. (79–80)⁸

Sumienie gryźć ich będzie, rumieniec ich zdradzi.
Radujmy się, Horacy!”

⁸ The Polish text is as follows:

“MASKA 7 Nitkę?

KONRAD Nitkę Ariadny.

Wawel then, the old Cracovian castle of the Polish kings, which was only rarely visited by them after the capital moved to Warsaw at the turn of the 17th century, is to play the role of the labyrinth. Indeed the castle has its labyrinthine aspects. It is one of the biggest castles in Europe, but its famous 16th-century courtyard offers a spectacular theatrical space which is often used now for various performances, including Wyspiański's plays.⁹ The name of Ariadne is associated with the notion of "pride," understood most probably in a Romantic way, as the justified pride that one takes in one's nation when there are good reasons for such a feeling to arise. No question is asked about Theseus and Minotaur, but it can be surmised that Konrad is to play the role of Theseus, whereas the Minotaur is probably what the poet calls, in Act 3 of the play in question, "the illusion of greatness," that is, the social attitude consisting of the cult of the largely idealized national past, a cult that fails to translate itself into any political action that could be valid for the future. This ineffective and nostalgic patriotism, bewitched by the obsolescent and labyrinthine glory of Wawel, is embodied, in the play, in a symbolic figure called Genius, who is fiercely criticized in the following speech uttered by Konrad:

I know your spells and superstitions, you are a ghastly apparition of the dim and distant past, merely a shadow, you wander around the stones and the columns of the temple. This is Wawel! Wawel! You have set in front of me the tombs and statues of knights sleeping in a stony slumber, their eyelids are closed on our fate and our life. The illusion of great-

MASKA 7 Wiodącą do labiryntu.

KONRAD Nie, tę, którą dzierżąc i z kłębka rozwijając, zejść można w labiryntu tajniki i najskrytsze ulice pałacowe przejść. I te górnych piąter, i te podziemu, i te dalekie drogi podkopów, i te ścieżki na wyżynie zawrotnej dachu.

MASKA 7 Cóż dla nas jest Labiryntem?

KONRAD Wawel.

MASKA 7 A Ariadną?

KONRAD Duma.

MASKA 7 A kłębkciem?

KONRAD Miłość dla tego, co jest . . .

MASKA 7 Tam.

KONRAD Nie.—We mnie!

MASKA 7 A!

KONRAD A prze mnie tam i pcha, i prowadzi . . .

MASKA 7 ?

KONRAD Nienawiść ku temu, CO JEST TAM."

⁹ It is remarkable that Robert Graves thinks of the original Cretan labyrinth as "the labyrinthine palace of Cnossos" by connecting it in a similar way to Wyspiański. The motif of the labyrinth represents a building that stands for the centre of political power. Cf. Graves's *The White Goddess* (106).

ness! You want to seduce us into the snare of the beauty that is dead and gone, and you want to awake moaning in our breast, instead of expressions of joy! O delusion! You bind us with a false happiness and you seduce us with visions of false power! The greatness of your statues is entirely spurious! No heart beats there and those stones can inspire us with no impulse, such as contempt, hatred or revenge, that could awake us and turn us into manly men. Begone! You are a lover of ruins and an admirer of godforsaken wilds! You have led us astray into the crossroads of contradictory desires, you seducer! You are a eulogist of false trails and a guardian of labyrinths, you lead our love into temptation and you poison this love! You lead us up blind alleys from which there is no exit, and in which one can see only the glow of rotting wood. (Wyspiański, *Dzieła zebrane* t. 5 169–70)¹⁰

This angry harangue is, one might say, Hamletian and anti-Hamletian at the same time. Something of this kind could be put into the mouth of Hamlet at the moment when he is particularly cross with the Ghost, like when he calls the Ghost “an old mole” (1.5.162). But Hamlet, on the whole, even though he complains of inactivity and small-mindedness, as well as revenge being long overdue, means his own inactivity and the shirking of duties, and he does not try to blame others.

The Old Actor, from the above scene, later admits that he used to play Hamlet:

I used to seek fame, I used to play Hamlet,
but now there are new Hamlets, Home—Children—Woman.
(Wyspiański, *Dzieła zebrane* t. 5 176)¹¹

¹⁰ The Polish text is as follows:

“Znam twoje gusła i hasła, widmo upiorne zagasłej przeszłości, cieniu—błądzisz wśród głązów i kolumn świątyni. Oto Wawel! Wawel!! Otoś stawil przede mną grobowce, posągne postaci rycerzy—legli w sen kamienny, powieki ich przymknięte na dolę i żywot nasz!

Złudo wielkości! oto chcesz ująć nas sidłem piękna, co zamarło i zgasło, i jęk chcesz obudzić w piersi naszej, a nie wołanie radości!

Złudo! kłamanym wiążesz nas szczęściem i potęgą nas uwodzisz kłamaną! Wielkość ta twoich posągów to fałsz udany i zwodliwy! nie bije tam serce w onych ani z głazu nie drgnie ku nam żądza, by wzgardą, nienawiścią i zemstą chciała nas budzić i czyniła z nas męże!!

Precz!!

Kochanku ruin i zapadłych uroczysk chwalco! tyżeś nas wwiódł w bezdroże rozstajnych dążeń, uwodzicielu.

Piewco dróg błędnych i strózu labiryntów, wodzisz na pokuszenie miłość naszą i miłość naszą zatruwasz! w uwodne powiódłszy sienie, sklepiska, skąd wyjścia nie masz, jeno ogniki świejące próchnem.”

¹¹ The Polish text is as follows:

“Goniłem niegdyś sławę, grywałem Hamleta.

Nowe dzisiaj Hamlety.—Dom.—Dzieci.—Kobieta.—”

He also remembers his father who perished in the January Uprising against Tsarist Russia in 1863 when he says “my father was a hero, and I am nothing” (155). The parallelism here is clear, for “to be a Hamlet” is a condition which is completely inaccessible to the moderns, who avoid lofty ideals, and lead a trivial, everyday existence. A clear semantic shift takes place. Hamlet no longer finds it difficult, or almost impossible, to fit himself into an old fashioned heroic ideal, because he becomes an exact icon of such an ideal.

It is tempting to compare this with T. S. Eliot’s famous *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1911), written several years after *Wyzwolenie*, in which the American poet expresses similar sentiments:

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No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool. (15)

In Eliot’s view it is Polonius as “the attendant lord” who satisfies the requirements of modernity, by being a time-serving hypocrite.

Interestingly enough, in Russia, another poetic appropriation of Hamlet appeared in Alexander Blok’s poem entitled *I’m Hamlet* (1914).

I’m Hamlet.
And my blood runs cold
When treachery is up to scheming;
My only love in the whole wide world.
Is in my heart, among the living.
Ophelia, the cold of life
Has taken you away, my dear;
The prince of Denmark, in a strife,
Hit with a blade, I am dying here.¹²

¹² The Russian original is as follows:

“Я – Гамлет. Холодеет кровь,
Когда плетет коварство сети,
И в сердце – первая любовь
Жива – к единственной на свете.

In sharp contrast to either Wyspiański or T. S. Eliot, Blok recognizes Hamlet's condition as quite compatible with modernity. However, he only thinks of it as a tragic predicament of alienation and betrayal, not as a heroic attitude. This point of view is expressed by Shakespeare's Hamlet, who does feel betrayed not only by his alleged friends, such as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but also by Ophelia, which, incidentally, is a topic that Blok, always romantically in love with his Fair Lady, would probably never appreciate. It might seem that at the beginning of the 20th century there was a need to measure modernity against the challenge and example that Shakespeare's Hamlet represents.

The Shakespearean theme in *Wyzwolenie* is summarized by the following statement of the Chorus:

Shakespeare is not going to move us
 Because he had no inkling
 Of our Polish soul,
 Even though all other things
 He knew, represented and defined;
 And yet I shall raise this objection against him,
 That he did not invent anything Polish;
 But this is really no disadvantage,
 Because all those characters live for me,
 Let me ask you, now that I know the Polish heroes,
 Is there anything English in you? (172)¹³

In this highly convoluted and somewhat obscure passage, Wyspiański seems to suggest that Shakespeare, after all, does move him, even though,

Тебя Офелию мою,
 Увел далёко жизни холод,
 И гибну, принц, в родном краю,
 Клинком отравленным заколот.”

¹³ The Polish text is as follows:
 “Nas przecie Szekspir nie poruszy,
 bo najmniejszego nie miał cale
 pojęcia naszej POLSKIEJ DUSZY—
 choć wszystko inne doskonale
 znał i przedstawił, i określił;
 to przecie tę mu wytknę wadę,
 że *nic polskiego nie wymyślił*;
 jednak to nie jest żadną wadą,
 bo dla mnie żyją te postacie.
 Was, gdy dziś polską znam plejadą—
 cóż angielskiego w sobie macie?”

in Shakespeare, there was nothing particularly Polish. The failure of Shakespeare to represent the “Polish soul” is paralleled, as it were, by the failure of the Poles to understand the nature of Shakespeare’s Englishness. However, both failures do not prevent Shakespeare’s characters from coming alive on the stage in a way that seems to cut across cultural and national borders. It is significant that Wyspiański does not readily accept the time-honoured but questionable theory of Shakespeare’s universality, which is based on the idea that his works transcend time and space.¹⁴ The Polish poet seems to demand that Shakespeare should become more meaningful in the Polish context, and he assumes that this will be impossible without our, that is Polish, understanding of Shakespeare’s English context.

What we find in *Wyzwolenie* is, in fact, a blueprint for what is included in the study on *Hamlet*. That is a deeply paradoxical conception of Hamlet’s personality, which in *Wyzwolenie* is represented by Konrad’s personality. The paradox consists in showing Hamlet and Konrad as those who appear to fulfil the function that somebody else had masterminded for them. No matter whether this masterful force is the father or the fatherland, or even those who are extremely unwilling to accept that function.

III

Let us now concentrate on Wyspiański’s study of *Hamlet*. One of its most remarkable aspects is his distinction between two Hamlets in *Hamlet*. The first Hamlet, in Wyspiański’s conception, also called the Hamlet of the old theatre, is similar to his father, and he is “the one who believes in the Ghost—the Father and trusts his words blindly” (22). The other, that is the Hamlet of the new theatre, is much more sparing in gestures and in rhetoric, and is the one who, apparently like Shakespeare himself, “casts doubt on the origin of the Ghost and on his words, and on the belief in his existence, and cannot believe in him unless by assuming that his origin is evil and Satanic” (26–27).¹⁵

Talking about the two Hamlets in *Hamlet* may refer to the complicated character of the protagonist, as illustrated in the above paragraph, but we should not forget that in the play there are actually two Hamlets, as Hamlet’s father bears the same name as his son. This fact is something

¹⁴ The best known formulation of this widespread conception can probably be found in Ben Jonson’s prefatory verses to the First Folio: “He was not of an age, but for all time !” (see Boyce 323)

¹⁵ The Polish text is as follows: “. . . rzuca podejrzenie na pochodzenie ducha—podaje w wątpliwość jego słowa—i wiare w niego;—nie jest w stanie w niego wierzyć inaczej, jak tylko że zło jest jego początkiem i Szatan.”

that the American critic Harold Bloom makes much of, suggesting that, in the original version of the play, in the so called Ur-Hamlet, Old Hamlet bore his original Danish name Horwendil, and that the later identicalness of their names should be understood in an ironic spirit:

Two Hamlets confront each other, with virtually nothing in common except their names. The Ghost expects Hamlet to be a version of himself, even as young Fortinbras is a reprint of old Fortinbras. Ironically the two Hamlets meet as if the Edda were encountering Montaigne: the Archaic Age faces the High Renaissance, with consequences as odd as any we might expect. (387)

Then Bloom talks about “two Hamlets” in a way that is similar to Wyspiański’s conception of the two Hamlets:

It seems sensible to suspect that Shakespeare’s first Hamlet was much more like Bellerofest’s Amleth: a fortunate trickster of archaic heroism, and reflecting not so much on himself as upon the dangers he had to evade. The second or revisionary Hamlet is not a dweller in an inadequate vehicle, he is at least two beings at once: a folkloric survivor, and a contemporary of Montaigne’s. (392)

The Ghost from the “folkloric” *Hamlet*, according to Bloom, was probably, unlike the later High Renaissance Ghost, a slightly ridiculous figure:

Horwendil the Ghost evidently was rather repetitious, and his cries of “Hamlet! Revenge!”¹⁶ evidently became a playgoer’s joke. Hamlet the Ghost is no joke; he is Amleth the Danish Heracles, a spirit as wily as he is bloody-minded. (388)

The confusion of having two Hamlets and two Ghosts is clearly not as great as it seems. In the earlier conception of the play Hamlet and the Ghost are almost one and the same person. It is only in what Bloom calls the Renaissance *Hamlet* that they become clearly different from each other. Now we seem to have a rehash of the old stereotype in which the Middle Ages, here masked as the Archaic Age, is starkly contrasted with the Renaissance.

¹⁶ Thomas Lodge made fun of a character who “walks for the most part in black under cover of gravity, and looks as pale as the vizard [mask] of the ghost who cried so miserably at the Theatre like an oyster-wife, Hamlet, revenge!.” See Friedberg.

The Polish critic Jan Kott, when writing on Wyspiański's *Study of Hamlet*, says the following:

So there are two Hamlets, the old and the new one, combined by Shakespeare into one character. The old Hamlet, who believes in spirits and follows the rules of bloody revenge, and the new, Renaissance Hamlet, who thinks, contemplates and doubts. (389)¹⁷

It appears that the approaches of Bloom and Wyspiański are similar enough. Bloom may owe a certain unacknowledged debt to Wyspiański, and perhaps also to Kott. Naturally, those interpretations are not completely identical. The first of Bloom's two Hamlets is the Hamlet of *Ur-Hamlet*, which Bloom believes to have been an early play by Shakespeare himself, and not by Thomas Kyd, as is usually assumed. Consequently the dynamic nature of Hamlet, as a character that is in the process of development, in Bloom is, first of all, the matter of maturation of Shakespeare's own mind, while in Wyspiański it is rather a matter of Shakespeare's radical revision of an old and antiquated tradition. This difference, however, is slight, and Kott seems right in attributing to Wyspiański the invention of a dynamic conception of Hamlet's personality:

Wyspiański pieces together his own *Hamlet* on the basis of Shakespeare's scenario, but, at the same time, he looks at Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a work that arose "in theatre and for theatre" from an earlier, pre-Shakespearean scenario. This is what the amazingly pioneering nature of Wyspiański's work consists in. *Hamlet* ceases to be a finished masterpiece, unique and closed, a tragedy that has fallen out of the sky; it is no longer only literature and philosophy, it becomes theatre—or better—a chapter in the history of theatre. (386)¹⁸

There is, in Kott's thinking, an unstated assumption that what he calls "the theatre" is superior to what might be called mere literature, because "the theatre" is, by its nature, more dynamic and more open to various interpretations

¹⁷The Polish text is as follows: "A więc jest dwóch Hamletów, stary i nowy, połączonych przez Szekspira w jedną postać. Stary Hamlet, który wierzy w duchy i posłuszny jest prawu rodowej zemsty, i nowy, renesansowy Hamlet, który zastanawia się, myśli i wątpi."

¹⁸The Polish text is as follows: "Wyspiański układa własnego *Hamleta* z Szekspirowskiego scenariusza, ale jednocześnie patrzy na Szekspirowskiego *Hamleta* jak na utwór, który powstał 'w teatrze i dla teatru' z wcześniejszego, przedszekspirowskiego scenariusza. I w tym jest właśnie zadziwiające prekursorstwo Wyspiańskiego. *Hamlet* przestaje być arcydziełem skończonym i niepowtarzalnym, tragedią, która spadła z nieba; nie jest już tylko literaturą i filozofią, staje się teatrem—albo lepiej—rozdziałem historii teatru."

than non-dramatic texts. I treat this more like an article of faith than a description of reality.

Another thing that I do not like in this conception of Hamlet by Wyspiański-Kott-Bloom is the easy way in which they contrast the old and new Hamlet, the pre-Renaissance and Renaissance Hamlet. If by “pre-Renaissance” we mean “medieval,” we should be reminded that the literature of medieval Europe was usually Christian, or at least it did not, as a rule, defy openly certain basic principles of Christianity, and this is exactly what the “primitive Hamlet” seems to do. It extols the principle of bloody, clannish vengeance, which is hardly compatible with Christian morality. The mature, “doubting” Hamlet seems unhappy about the mission of revenge imposed on him by the Ghost, but he never openly questions the logic or the morality of that mission. In this way *Hamlet*, as a story, seems to have evolved from an openly un-Christian story, to a story that is neither clearly Christian, nor un-Christian, or anti-Christian, which Harold Bloom confirms by saying that *Hamlet* is neither a Protestant, nor a Catholic play, neither Christian nor non-Christian (391). Medieval ghost stories were different. They implied a strong belief in ghosts, but not in the principle of revenge. On the contrary, the revenant ghosts in religious medieval legends call on their still living relations to achieve some form of reconciliation with their old enemies.¹⁹

IV

What we cannot escape when talking about Wyspiański’s *Hamlet* is his appropriation of Shakespeare’s play for patriotic purposes. Let us return then to Wyspiański’s vision of Hamlet appearing on the fortifications of the Wawel Castle in Cracow:

You can see him as he is walking with a book in his hand in the upper gallery of the royal castle of the Jagiellonians. You can see him as he comes up, around midnight, to the guards, where his friend Horatio already awaits him, on the terraces of Wawel, near the tower of Lubranka, close to the part of the castle built under Casimir the Great, and there the Ghost appears! . . . (14)²⁰

¹⁹ For example, the ghost in the story called *The Burning Spear*, related by the 11th century German monk Otloh of St Emmeram, appears to his sons in order to call on them to return to a monastery the land that he had unjustly taken away from it. The father’s ghost in this story shows very graphically how much he had to suffer in the Otherworld for having committed this sin, although we have to assume that he is in Purgatory because the moment his sons do their father’s bidding he is released from torment (Joynes 26–27).

²⁰ The Polish text is as follows: “Widzicie go: jak idzie z książką w ręku w tej górnej galerii pałacu Jagiellonów. Widzicie go: jak koło północy przychodzi ku strażnikom,

The castle of Wawel is, of course, a place of central importance in Polish history. It was the seat of Poland's power from, more or less, the middle of the 11th century to the end of the 16th century when the decision was taken, even now considered unwise by many, to move the capital from Cracow to Warsaw.²¹ The castle is the necropolis of the Polish kings, and the place of their coronations.²² Wawel also symbolized Poland's aspirations for independence at the time when no Polish state existed. This was also incidentally the time when Wyspiański lived. In one of his most important plays, called *Wesele* (*The Wedding*), one of the characters, trying unsuccessfully to rouse his compatriots to action, or rather to an armed rebellion, the aim of which is, of course, the restoration of the Polish state, shouts: "To arms! To horses! The court of Wawel is awaiting you!" (Wyspiański, *Dzieła zebrane* t. 4 229).²³ This entirely positive vision of the Wawel Castle contrasts sharply with the sceptical and critical assessment of Wawel which we could see in Wyspiański's *Wyzwolenie* (*Liberation*).

But Wawel was also personally important to Wyspiański since he spent many years as a child living literally in the shadow of that huge castle. His family lived in Kanonicza Street in a house which in the 15th century belonged to Jan Długosz, a famous historian, who wrote, albeit in Latin, the most celebrated history of Poland. Długosz was also the educator of the sons of king Casimir IV, as well as those of the Jagiellonian dynasty. Wyspiański also took part in the campaign to get the castle back from the Austrians, who had treated Wawel as a convenient citadel from which they could hold the Polish population of the city under submission, by stationing a permanent Austrian garrison there. The Poles, of course, regarded this as deeply humiliating, especially in view of the fact that Galicia, that is the part of Poland where Cracow is situated, enjoyed considerable autonomy in the Austro-Hungarian empire. Finally, in 1905, the emperor Franz Joseph agreed, for a considerable sum of money, to withdraw the Austrian soldiers from Wawel. This was also the year in which Wyspiański wrote his *Hamlet*, and the year in which he put forward the Acropolis project (never realized), for turning the Wawel Hill into

gdzie czeka go przyjaciel Horacy na terasach Wawelu około Lubranki, w bliskości części Kazimierzowskiej zamku, i tam duch wstępuje."

²¹ Officially, only the king and the royal court moved to Warsaw (in 1596). The capital remained in Cracow until the end of the first Polish state in 1795, but of course the de facto capital was Warsaw.

²² Only two Polish kings, beginning with Boleslaus the Bold, were not crowned in Wawel. Stanisław Leszczyński and Stanisław August Poniatowski, were crowned in Warsaw, and were both later forced to abdicate, which some people do not consider an accident.

²³ In the Polish original, the quotation goes like this: "Hej, hej, bracia, chycie koni! // chycie broni, chycie broni!! // Czeka was WAWELSKI DWÓR!!!!"

a kind of national temple. The project was inspired, naturally, by the Athenian Acropolis, but probably also by its association with King Solomon's temple in Jerusalem that used to stand on the Hill of Zion.²⁴ After all, the Wawel Hill includes, apart from the castle, the Wawel Cathedral, which is the principle church of the Roman-Catholic Archbishop of Cracow. Cracow is sometimes called a "Little Rome," since it contains a great number of important institutions connected with the Catholic Church.

Wyspiański's vision of Hamlet on the outer walls of Wawel may have more to it than meets the eye. The author can see him "near the tower of Lubranka, close to the part of the castle built under Casimir the Great" (14). Perhaps it is no accident that Hamlet can be seen on this particular part of the Wawel Hill. Lubranka is also called the Senate Tower, not because the Polish Senate had its sessions there, but because the tower was used as a prison house for the senators. Indeed it is an appropriate place for Hamlet to appear, because he is beset by the phenomenon of criminality in the uppermost echelon of society. His chief enemies are the king, his uncle, and one of the senators, Polonius, on whose servility the criminal king can count regardless of the circumstances. Hamlet's connection with the Senate Tower is also ironic because the Prince of Denmark does not even take into account the possibility of solving his problems by putting his faith in the ordinary course of justice.²⁵

The passage in question also invokes the name of Casimir the Great, the only Polish king to be called "great," in spite of the fact that his reign did not coincide with the time of Poland's greatest territorial extent or international position. Wyspiański showed a keen interest in that king, and wrote a poem, or rather a dramatic monologue, entitled *Casimir the Great*. However, although it is clear that this 14th-century monarch of the Piast dynasty, the last Polish king from that dynasty, interested Wyspiański mainly for symbolic purposes, the poem says almost nothing about the times of Casimir the Great, or about his life, or personality. Yet there is a clear link between the topic of *Hamlet* and that of Casimir. The latter is shown, in Wyspiański's poem, as a ghost who is transported from the Middle Ages to the second half of the 19th century. The ghost functions as a figure representing the Poles' guilty conscience about their lost chances, their lost independence, and their lost greatness. On the other hand,

²⁴ In fact the Jewish patriarch Jacob, who is one of the *dramatis personae* of Wyspiański's *Acropolis* exclaims at some point: "Swing wide, gate of Sion!" ["Rozwierajcie się, podwoje Syjonu!"] (see Wyspiański, *Akropolis*).

²⁵ It is interesting that in Wyspiański's unrealized design for turning Wawel into a Polish Acropolis, the Senate Tower is situated close to the new Senate building and the headquarters of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences.

however, it is Casimir who is confronted with the crimes committed against Poland, and it is he who feels the desire and duty for revenge against his country's enemies (cf. Wyspiański, *Dzieła zebrane* t. 11 41). The revenge he eventually meets out though is not over an external enemy, but against one of the false prophets, the self-styled leaders of the nation, who, as Wyspiański says, steal that nation's soul (cf. Wyspiański, "Kazimierz Wielki" in *Dzieła zebrane* t. 11 47).

Wyspiański's celebrated design for a stained glass window representing Casimir is rather shocking since it shows a decomposing corpse with a crown, a corpse whose stiffness and size lend it some dignity, but which, at the same time, generally repulses the viewer. This is an allusion to the second burial of Casimir's body in 1869. The finding of the remnants of the king was painted by Wyspiański's master and teacher, Jan Matejko. What happened in 1869 is represented, in Wyspiański's poem, as a kind of second coming of the king. It is similar to what, in mystical terms, was seen in 1869, five years after the ruthless suppression by the Russian authorities, of the so-called January Uprising. The Polish populace can be seen shouting "come back" to the king, hoping for some kind of liberation by the hand of the long dead king. From a Western point of view, the whole story clearly resembles the belief in a return, from the legendary Island of Avalon, of king Arthur who is seen as the liberator of Celtic lands, or of England. The clamoring for a Piast to fill the Polish throne during the free election of 1669 was, we should note, of the same kind. Following such a national catastrophe, a ghost from the supposedly glorious, peaceful and secure past is long awaited.

1869 may also be significant since it was also the year of Wyspiański's own birth. He may have thought of himself as being mystically connected with the symbolic resurrection of the great king. The king would have, thus, become the ghost who fathered Wyspiański, turning the Polish artist and playwright into a deeply Hamletian figure himself.

V

In one of his poems,²⁶ Czesław Miłosz, a famous 20th-century Polish poet, compares two contemporary Polish figures, Stanisław Wyspiański and the British writer Joseph Conrad. He comes to the unsurprising conclusion that Wyspiański was a much more provincial writer than Conrad, and, unlike Conrad, he was not concerned with the most important issues of Western civilization. Maybe he was not, or at least not as directly as Conrad.

²⁶ In his poem "Iraktat poetycki" ("Poetical Treatise"); see Morawiec (7–11).

Yet it would be a mistake to accept the idea that his interests were simply limited to Polish affairs; in many ways he was a cosmopolitan—profoundly influenced by such foreign writers of his epoch as Ibsen, Hauptmann or Materlinck. But, it is true that his links with the English speaking culture were rather tenuous, and his interest in the Russian culture which he could have been against, just like Conrad, could have been somewhat prejudiced. Nonetheless, Wyspiański's treatise on Hamlet does contain an interesting aspect which has a bearing on Russo-Polish relations. At one point, the author no longer seems satisfied with Wawel as the backdrop for his *Hamlet*, and instead he starts thinking about the Kremlin in Moscow:

I consider it remarkable that, even if in this Shakespearean tragedy there may be no references to contemporary great history and real events—which in this tragedy should have found their expression—at the same time when Shakespeare was constructing this drama, in the years 1601–1604, a great drama and tragedy was taking place, and it was full of many secrets, worthy of Hamlet, it was the MOSCOW TRAGEDY: the tragedy of Godunov, Fyodor, the False Dmitri, over which the Ghost of Ivan the Terrible is hovering. The great dramatic backdrop of events, preceding the drama itself, features the two Titans, fighting something like an Ariostic duel, two titans dueling for power over the two states: Batory and Ivan. And then in the very course of the drama this strange figure of Fyodor, those strange pieces of news about the adolescent Dmitri, about the death of that Dmitri, about that Dmitri having been saved, that constant reappearance of Dmitri embodied in different figures—those increasingly strange rumours and Godunov's anxiety; Godunov, who the whole of Claudius's part could recognize as his own—that young Fortinbras gathering volunteers from various parts of . . . Norway—those strange phenomena in the sky and on the earth, “just like before the death of the great Julius, when Rome was at the height of its power”—that presence of numerous Englishmen in the closed circle connected with the events in Moscow and in the Kremlin, and the reports of those Englishmen—and that THEATRE in London, which is going to SHOW THE VERY AGE AND BODY OF THE TIME their FORM AND PRESSURE . . .²⁷

I do not want to say anything more by means of this juxtaposition—but I can't resist the JUXTAPOSITION. And I would consider it proper to juxtapose the ART and the artist's work, on the one hand, and the mere reality of the events, on the other.

²⁷ Cf. *Hamlet* (3.2.22–23).

And I would say that what the soul of the artist achieved and reached by means of thinking, therefore, what part of the mysteries ART managed to divine—was at the same time TAKING PLACE on the great STAGE OF THE WORLD. (164–66)²⁸

Jan Kott quotes the above passage, but only to illustrate Wyspiański's intention of finding a suitable historical backdrop to the story of Hamlet (394). Why this particular backdrop should be suitable, he does not explain.²⁹ Nevertheless, it is necessary to discover how we should translate Shakespeare's Elsinore tragedy, into Wyspiański's Wawel tragedy, and that tragedy into the Kremlin tragedy which Wyspiański also imagined. To get a grasp of the situation we should first of all note the importance Wyspiański attaches to the figure of Fortinbras as Hamlet's alter ego:

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²⁸ The Polish text is as follows: "Zastanawiające wydaje mi się, że gdy w tej tragedii Szekspira może i zgoła nie ma żadnego oddźwięku współczesnej wielkiej historii i dziejów rzeczywistych—które by w tragedii tej przecież się wydobyły—to właśnie równocześnie, gdy Szekspir dramat ten budował, w latach 1601–1604 buduje się i rozgrywa na wielkim świecie: dramat i tragedia, równie wiele zagadek obejmująca, zagadek Hamleta godnych—to: TRAGEDIA MOSKIEWSKA: Godunowa, Fiodora, Dymitra Samozwańca, nad którą unosi się duch: Iwana Groźnego. Że to wielkie tło dramatyczne zdarzeń, dramat sam poprzedzające, maluje dwóch Tytanów, zmagających się jakoby w pojedynku ariostycznym, dwóch tytanów w pojedynku o władzę nad państwami dwoma: Batorego i Iwana. A potem w samym już przebiegu dramatu ta dziwna postać Fiodora, te dziwne wiadomości o dorastającym Dymitrze—o śmierci tegoż Dymitra, to znów o tegoż Dymitra ocaleniu—to ciągle pojawianie się—Dymitra w coraz innej postaci—te coraz dziwniejsze z rokiem każdym wieści i niepokoje Godunowa; Godunow, który całą rolę Klaudiusza może w każdym wierszu uznać za swoją—ten młody Fortynbras zbierający rotę ochotnicze z różnych zakątków . . . Norwegii—te dziwne na niebie i ziemi zjawiska, 'zupełnie jak przed śmiercią wielkiego Juliusza, gdy Rzym u szczytu stał swojej potęgi'—ta obecność wielu Anglików w zamkniętym kole terenu ówczesnych wypadków w Moskwie i w Kremlu i relacje tychże Anglików—ten TEATR w Londynie, który zamierza ŚWIATU I DUCHOWI WIEKU ukazywać POSTAĆ ICH i PIĘTNO . . .

Niczego więcej przez to zestawienie nie chcę powiedzieć—ale nie mogę się oprzeć—ZESTAWIENIU. I zestawiać sądziłbym tylko SZTUKĘ i dzieło myśli artysty—ze samą już tylko rzeczywistością wydarzeń.

I powiedziałbym, że ku czemu doszła i co myślą osiągnęła dusza artysty, a więc co z tajemnic odgadła SZTUKA—to i działo się równocześnie na wielkiej SCENIE ŚWIATA."

²⁹ It might be considered naïve on the part of Wyspiański to expect Shakespeare to be interested in rather exotic, from his point of view, East European matters, but the Polish poet's mention, in the above quotation, of "that presence of numerous Englishmen in the closed circle connected with the events in Moscow and in the Kremlin, and the reports of those Englishmen" is a means to counter such suppositions. Clearly, Wyspiański was aware of the lively commercial contacts between England and Russia in the times of Elizabeth I and James I. The English reports he mentions may have been those prepared by the envoys of the so-called Muscovy Trading Company, which started its activity in 1555.

Fortinbras has to avenge his father's death.
 Hamlet has to avenge his father's death.
 Hamlet is drawn by the Ghost, who wants his son to repeat the course
 of his own life.
 Fortinbras continues his father's thoughts, aims, ideas, plans and inten-
 tions. (88)³⁰

In his own paraphrase of *Hamlet*, Wyspiański lets Hamlet go to Norway, not England, so he can join forces with Fortinbras with the intention of overthrowing Claudius, which would satisfy both Fortinbras's desire to avenge his father, who had been killed by the king of Denmark, and Claudius's brother, as well as Hamlet's desire to kill Claudius, the murderer of his father. What Hamlet fails to notice is that by doing this he is delivering his fatherland into the hands of his traditional enemies, the Norwegians, since Hamlet has no armed forces of his own. What adds spice to the whole situation is that Elsinore is defended by Horatio, who is Claudius's commander-in-chief, and he, Hamlet's closest friend, notices to his horror, that Hamlet is fighting in the ranks of Horatio's, and Hamlet's, fatherland's enemies. When Horatio dramatically accuses Hamlet of high treason, the pressure on Hamlet is so great that he suddenly dies his heart breaks. His best friend has turned against him, and he, trying to defend the honour of his biological father, sometimes called Old Denmark, has turned out to be the murderer of his metaphorical father, that is old Denmark.

It is clear enough that, from Wyspiański's point of view, Denmark and Norway did not matter much, so the historical allegory would have to be read in a different way: Denmark stands for Russia, while Norway for Poland, at a time when Russia and Poland were still nations of comparable power and influence that is at the beginning of the 17th century, when Hamlet was written. The main conflict in the tragedy of Hamlet, as seen by Wyspiański, is not the one between Hamlet and Claudius, but rather between dead men: Fortinbras's father, that is Old Fortinbras, and Hamlet's father, that is Old Hamlet. Old Hamlet, in this conception, seems to represent Ivan the Terrible, the tsar of Russia, while Old Fortinbras is Stephen Batory, the king of Poland. The two, Ivan and Stephen, were indeed deadly enemies who waged a fierce war with each other from 1577 to 1582. Claudius represents, of course, as Wyspiański himself explicitly says, Boris Godunov, the counsellor and suc-

³⁰ The Polish text is as follows:

"Fortynbras winien pomścić śmierci ojca.

Hamlet winien pomścić śmierci ojca.

Hamleta ciągnie Duch na tę samą drogę, którą sam za żywota kroczył.

Fortynbras podejmuje myśli, cele, zamiary i idee, dążenia, plany ojca."

cessor of Ivan the Terrible. Godunov, as far as I know, has never been accused of murdering Ivan, whose close collaborator he was. But, he was repeatedly accused of murdering Ivan's youngest son Dmitri, who could have jeopardized Boris's position as a regent during the reign of Ivan's feeble-minded son, Fyodor. Godunov's sister was Fyodor's wife, so he was not Ivan's brother, but still a brother of his daughter-in-law. Later the above mentioned Dmitri would, in a sense, come back to life as the so-called False Dmitri, or rather self-styled Dmitri, who pretended to be Ivan the Terrible's son, and who had miraculously escaped Boris Godunov's hired assassins. There were several of those false Dmitris, but the first was certainly the most successful, and he actually managed, with some help from his Polish friends, to overthrow the tsar, who was not, admittedly, Boris Godunov, but his son, another Fyodor. Young Fortinbras would have to be identified as Sigismundus III, the king of Poland after Batory,³¹ or as Sigismundus's son, Ladislaus, who became the later king of Poland, Ladislaus IV. Indeed Ladislaus IV had a good chance of becoming tsar of Russia, an opportunity largely spoiled by his father, who wanted to be the tsar himself. Young Hamlet, in this context, would be, as could be expected, the False Dmitri,³² or rather the Genuine Dmitri, assuming, even though this is very unlikely, that he really was the son of the dead monarch, that is Ivan. Dmitri indeed managed to cause the death of his uncle, or rather, in this case, the son of a brother of his elder brother's wife, that is Fyodor, the son of Boris. The rule of Dmitri was brief, and ended in his tragic death, as the result of an insurrection, after only eleven months. The above historical analogies are very imperfect, but they must have inflamed Wyspiański's desire to project the story of Hamlet on to the vast scene of East European conflicts.

Seen from this point of view, Wyspiański's *Hamlet* becomes not only a story about the troubled relations between Poland and Russia, but also about the people tragically involved in those relations (such as the "baser natures" coming between the sharp swords of mighty opponents). Specifically, it was a nationalistic tragedy, and a tragedy about the meaning of nationalism and patriotism. In this tragedy, the most dramatic scene takes place between people representing two conceptions of patriotism, one attached to the idea of the fatherland as a place where abstract ideas such as

³¹ Sigismundus III was from the Swedish Vasa dynasty, and only distantly related to Batory. He was the son of Catherine Jagiellon, the younger sister of Anna Jagiellon, who was Batory's wife.

³² It is known that the first of the Dmitiri impostors also pretended to be an illegitimate son of Stephen Batory, the Polish king. Naturally, he could not be both, so presumably he claimed officially that he was Ivan's son, while secretly he thought of himself as Stephen's son, which of course must have made it easier for him to be a Russian patriot in name only, while in fact acting wholeheartedly as a Polish agent.

freedom, law and justice should triumph, and the other attached to the notion of the “Realpolitik” or “political realism,” and the principle of “right or wrong, it is my country.” In Wyspiański’s vision of *Hamlet*, Hamlet himself represents the former, we might say, political version of patriotism, while Horatio represents the latter, let us say the ethnic version of patriotism.

A similar dilemma can be observed in *King Lear* in which Cordelia tries, unsuccessfully, to restore justice and redress the wrongs at the head of a foreign, in this case French army, opposed by a British army in which one of the officers is Edmund, an evidently black character and a protector of the devilish sisters Goneril and Regan, but, in a sense, a defender of the fatherland. Wyspiański certainly did not think of this dilemma only in a historical context. He was facing a very real problem that was slowly coming to a head in the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War—he died seven years before the war began. The problem consisted in whether to back the political and military venture of the commander Józef Piłsudski, who planned to invade the so-called Russian Poland, and to avenge the insurrectionists of the November and January Uprisings, in collusion, however, with the Austrian, and, in effect, also the German army, or to refuse to support this initiative because it would mean helping a hereditary enemy, that is the Germans, in occupying Polish land on the pretext of Poland being torn by a quarrel among the Slavic brothers, that is the Poles and the Russians. As we know, Wyspiański, presumably after a great mental struggle, chose the first option, his Hamletian nature clamouring for revenge.

VI

What is characteristic of Wyspiański’s interpretation, the interpretation from which he refused to draw all the consequences (echoing Hamlet’s “the rest is silence,” Wyspiański says: I do not want to say anything more³³), is that it turns Shakespeare’s play into “the drama of ghosts” (Wyspiański, *Hamlet* 20). Yet we should remember that Wyspiański was very unhappy with the rule of ghosts from the past. This is why he contemptuously rejected Goethe’s interpretation of *Hamlet*, according to which Hamlet failed because he was not equal to the task he had been entrusted with by the Ghost. Wyspiański, in effect, says: on the contrary, it was the nature of that task that was not equal to Hamlet, or rather was beneath his dignity, for, as Wyspiański claims, Shakespeare was against seeking revenge

³³ By this I mean, of course, his already quoted: “Niczego więcej . . . nie chcę powiedzieć” (Wyspiański, *Hamlet* 166).

for other people's wrongs, one can legitimately take revenge only for wrongs committed against oneself (Wyspiański, *Hamlet* 20). According to Wyspiański, it was the true reason for Hamlet's delaying tactics. Only when Hamlet realized that the king had been plotting beforehand, by poisoning the points of the swords, and preparing the poisoned cup, for his nephew's murder (cf. Wyspiański, *Hamlet* 122–23, 128), could Hamlet finally carry out his revenge, the revenge for his own death, rather than for that of his father. He no longer acts as an agent of the Ghost, and a servant of the ghosts of the past, but as his own independent self.

Hamlet's decision to take up Laertes challenge of a duel is represented by Wyspiański as an act of elaborate suicide, as an acceptance of Fate, but, at the same time, as an act of rebellion against the roles prepared for him either by his uncle, or his father. This time Hamlet is not the one who has prepared a mousetrap for his wicked uncle, but rather someone who is about to be caught in the mousetrap prepared for him by the same uncle. Yet Hamlet, at least Wyspiański's Hamlet, does not let himself be caught. He is consciously walking into this mousetrap, and therefore capable of turning it, at least partly, against the one who has prepared it. We should not marvel too much at this. The mousetrap is a labyrinth, which, as we have seen, is Wyspiański's metaphor for the theatre. It is Hamlet rather than Claudius who is shown, in Shakespeare's play, as the expert actor and theatre director.

The labyrinthine nature of Wyspiański's interpretation is also visible, as we have seen above, in the Polish poet's ability to see the tragedy of Hamlet in the context of the history of Poland and Russia. It also offers a perspective of the Danish, English, Polish and Russian Hamlets mirroring each other. Plato in his dialogue *Euthydemus* says the following about the labyrinth, which is understood as a way of reasoning:

Then it seemed like falling into a labyrinth: we thought we were at the finish, but our way bent round and we found ourselves as it were back at the beginning, and just as far from that which we were seeking at first. (qtd. in Kerényi 92)

Kerényi adds that

[t]hus the present-day notion of a labyrinth as a place where one can lose [his] way must be set aside. It is a confusing path, hard to follow without a thread, but, provided [the traverser] is not devoured at the midpoint, it leads surely, despite twists and turns, back to the beginning. (93)

The above quotation provides us with a vision of a labyrinth that seems, at the same time, a good description of what Wyspiański does to *Hamlet*. He multiplies bold interpretations and possibilities of the reading, but they all lead us “back to the beginning,” if by “beginning” we understand both Shakespeare’s text, and the most fundamental questions concerning the relation between the individual and the social group, or nation, to which he or she belongs. The labyrinthine nature of this kind of thinking naturally means that it is dangerous, and, at least, implies the risk of confusion and disorientation.

Unlike many other appropriations of Shakespeare, Wyspiański’s version of *Hamlet*, and his thinking about *Hamlet*, or with the help of *Hamlet*, is never too distant from the original play. On the one hand, Wyspiański seems to have appropriated Hamlet rather radically, for his specific needs, and as a metaphor of himself, that is of someone who embodied the Polish national tradition and, at the same time, rebelled against it. But, on the other, the Cracovian playwright does so always with the original play in hand, even though he only had a Polish translation at his disposal. In that original play, the topic of the protagonist’s troubled relationship with his father, and his social environment, is already represented. As a result, Wyspiański’s appropriation looks like an expansion of the original text, not a narrowing of it motivated by having some personal axe to grind.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS OF DRAMA

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“Consider Yourself One of Us”: The Dickens Musical on Stage and Screen

ABSTRACT

Charles Dickens's work has been taken and adapted for many different ends. Quite a lot of attention has been given to film and television versions of the novels, many of which are very distinguished. The stage and screen musical based on his work, essentially a product of the last fifty years, has been neither as studied nor as respected. This paper looks at the connection between Dickens's novels, the celebration of “London-ness” and its articulation in popular forms of working-class music and song. It will argue that potentially unpromising texts were taken and used to articulate pride and a sense of community for groups representing the disadvantaged of the East End and, more specifically, for first-generation Jewish settlers in London. This is all the more surprising as it was in the first instance through depictions of *Oliver Twist* and the problematic figure of Fagin that an Anglo-Jewish sensibility was able to express itself. Other texts by Dickens, notably *Pickwick Papers*, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, were also adapted to musical forms with varying results, but the period of their heyday was relatively short, as their use of traditional and communitarian forms gave place in the people's affection to manufactured pop/rock and operetta forms. I will argue that this decline was partly the product of changing London demographics and shifts in theatre economics and partly of the appropriation of Dickens by the academy.

Keywords: Dickens, musical, stage, screen, *Oliver!*

In this article, I would like to attempt to recreate what the fiction of Dickens meant for many of the citizens and readers of London in the period around 1960. By so doing, I hope to be able to characterize the particular shape and style of the musical adaptations of his work which came upon the stage over the following twenty years. Finally, I briefly review the period after 1980 when the nature of musical Dickens seemed to darken and respond to other communal expectations.

So, in pursuance of my first objective, here is an extract from a family memoir by the poet and children's writer Michael Rosen:

We are on holiday on the coast of Yorkshire, not far from Whitby. It's a campsite and there are two families . . . It is 1959 and I am 13. . . . So we sit ourselves down on sleeping bags, blankets and cushions. The tilley lamp sits on a fold-up wooden chair, my father sits on another in the middle of us. Looking around the tent, I can only see our faces catching the light, as if we are just masks hanging there, our bodies left outside in the dark perhaps. In my father's hand is a book—*Great Expectations*—and every night, there in the tent, he reads it to us. Without any hesitation, backtracking or explanation he reads Pip's story in the voice of the secondary-school teacher he is, but each and every character is given a flavour—some more than others: Magwitch, of course, allows him to do his native cockney.

Thinking about it now, I can see that his Jagers was probably based on a suburban headteacher from one of the schools he taught in; Uncle Pumblechook could have been derived from the strangely pompous shopkeepers and publicans who peopled the hardware stores and cafés of outer London, where we lived in the 1950s. But over the years, as my father tells us about his own upbringing, some of Dickens characters start to mix and merge with our own relatives. (2)

In this passage about a school teacher doing not just the police in different voices (which is, I must say, only one of a number of detailed connections he establishes), Rosen makes clear the extraordinary bond which existed between the fiction of Dickens and the life narratives of Londoners of Jewish extraction in the middle years of the twentieth century. In another passage, he reads his father Harold's rendering of Trabb's boy from *Great Expectations*, and his catch-phrase "Don't know yer!" as an expression of repressed guilt about escaping family and social connections in the East End and even further eastward, associations which are embarrassing and redolent of hardship. As he writes:

In the shuffling of the pack of these East End boys, each in their own different ways got what they needed to leave this place, to move northwards or eastwards to get out of this poverty and foreignness, to become less “heimish,” as it was called—the “heim” being the mythical faraway place in eastern Europe where everyone looked and talked like their grandparents, lived in tiny houses and kept chickens. (Rosen 5)

The history I would like to relate is exactly about this desire to move onward and upward from these roots, again using Dickens as a vehicle, and again releasing in the process complex emotional reactions of longing, affection, loyalty and guilt. It is the history of the Dickens stage musical and it concerns itself essentially with the period 1960 to 1975. The Dickens musical of this period was exclusively the creation of Londoners and almost exclusively the creation of London’s East End Jewish community. Their life experiences and cultural styles inform the stage musical at this time, and bring in an unprecedentedly successful period for British musical artists. Before 1960, the stage musical was with very few exceptions an American art form. Hardly any British musical, and there were not many, travelled well. *The Boyfriend* (1954) by Sandy Wilson had some impact in London and New York but Julian Slade and Dorothy Reynolds’s London success *Salad Days* (also 1954) was too parochial and class-bound to be staged elsewhere (see Lerner 199). Since the early 1970s, the native British musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber have vied with the American musicals (of his great rival Stephen Sondheim but also of many other talents) for hegemony. After the society musicals of Ivor Novello and Noël Coward and before Lloyd Webber, there was really only the cockney musical of the 1960s and its curious affinity with Dickens.

East End songwriters and composers began to emerge, mostly from the Music Hall tradition, in the mid-1950s. They rose to prominence following the first wave of British pop music, centring on the vocal styles of Lonnie Donegan, Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard, Marty Wilde and Anthony Newley, a stable of singers managed in emulation of Elvis Presley’s management by Col Tom Parker by British impresario Larry Parnes. Best among the new brigade of writers was the Stepney-born Lionel Begleiter, son of a Jewish tailor from Lvov in Poland (now Ukraine), better known as Lionel Bart, who changed his name to Bart after passing Bart’s Hospital in London aboard a bus. Bart had played in a band with Tommy Steele and Mike Pratt, and was responsible for such hits as “Living Doll” and “The Young Ones” for Cliff Richards, “Little White Bull” and “Rock with the Caveman” for Tommy Steele, “Do You Mind!” for Anthony Newley and the Bond theme “From Russia with Love” for Matt Monro.

Bart had no musical training at all but he was a very gifted lyricist. His career took off when he provided the lyrics for the inaugural Mermaid Theatre production of a Henry Fielding adaptation *Lock Up Your Daughters* (1959), with music supplied by bandleader and film composer Laurie Johnson. Also working on this show were director Peter Coe and stage designer Sean Kenny. *Lock Up Your Daughters* ran for six months and was made into a bawdy (but not musical) film in the late 1960s. On the basis of his work here, his song-writing for films and performing with the Unity Theatre earlier in the decade, Bart was invited to provide music and lyrics for the Theatre Workshop production of *Fings ain't Wot They Used T'Be*. Both Unity and Theatre Workshop grew out of working-class leftist movements of the mid-century. Their leading lights, like Joan Littlewood and Evan McColl, were regularly monitored (and ostracized) for their communist sympathies. *Fings* was a Brechtian raunchy celebration of the east London underworld. Based on a memoir of his gangland experiences by ex-con Frank Norman, the behaviour of gamblers, pimps, tarts and bent coppers was palliated by lively up-tempo music and song from Bart. Theatre Workshop's method under Joan Littlewood was improvisational, which was just as well because Frank Norman himself was barely literate. The show was put together in little over a fortnight. A successful Theatre Royal Stratford East production was followed rapidly by three more, one of which was a lucrative West End transfer. As both composer and lyricist this time, and working alongside fellow East Ender soul-mates and wholly in his native argot, Bart was able to make his name in musical theatre.

The tale is told that Lionel Bart never at any time read Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. The musical *Oliver!*, the book, lyrics and music for which were all written by Bart, was based essentially on David Lean's 1948 movie, which Bart had seen and admired when in the army doing National Service. These were Bart's most fertile years and he was looking for a follow-up success. The Dickens idea came on the scene later than many of the songs he had already written:

"He wrote a show called *Petticoat Lane*," said Tommy Steele in a BBC interview. "It was a sort of synopsis of a show that he wanted me to do with him: and listening to some of the songs he tinkered about with . . . there were things like 'Consider Yourself,' little embryos coming out which were later to become the *Oliver!* score. . . ."

Nobody knew and nobody seemed to care—not even when Lionel abandoned the original *Petticoat Lane* idea and ported the songs over to

a tentative adaptation of Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (Stafford and Stafford 59; 1st ellipsis in orig.).

It is of critical interest that many of the songs for *Oliver!* pre-existed the show and were written to animate another show called *Petticoat Lane*. The said lane was the East End’s premier street market and clearly the songs were intended to do for London’s street trading fraternity what Fings had done for its criminal fringe.

Dickens’s work has constantly been brought upon the stage but there had never been a successful musical version of one of his novels. The complex narratives and proliferation of differentiated characters work against their adaptation for “the 2 hours’ traffic” of the stage, to say nothing of the musical styles that would render Dickens’s social milieu. Indeed, it is doubtful if the founding musical text of this emergent sub-genre would have been performed if Bart had not been able to solve the problem of *Oliver Twist*’s presumed anti-Semitism. David Lean’s film had hit the cinemas as a follow-up to his wildly successful *Great Expectations* of 1946, but he had been naïve in imagining that he could produce a faithful version of Fagin in the period immediately after the revelations about the concentration camps. The pejorative portrayal of Fagin was something of a blind-spot in Dickens himself; when it was pointed out to him by a reader, he defended himself vigorously. But he was careful to dilute the criticism a little in a republishing of 1867 (see Meyer 239–52). Lionel Bart managed the transformation more satisfactorily, using the tools of a musical comedy. Fagin has a series of comic patter songs which emphasize playfulness at the expense of roguishness, yet do not underplay his Yiddishness. With these songs came dance routines with his gang of pick-pocket boys, which show Fagin as the biggest kid in the group. In particular, he is allowed to bond with the Artful Dodger, and to act with Nancy as a seconder to her defence of Oliver. All opprobrium attaches to Bill Sykes; Sykes himself has only one song in the musical and even that was cut from the film version. The keynote of Bart’s Dickensian criminals is inclusiveness. For example, the moment in Lean’s film when Dodger (played by Anthony Newley) spots the newly-arrived and solitary Oliver in London and takes him down dark alleys and slums to Fagin’s lair is replaced in the musical by the winning song “Consider Yourself One of Us,” which is delivered not just by Dodger but by the whole of London’s teeming street-life. Later, Dodger’s song for Nancy, “I’d Do Anything,” draws in Oliver and Bet, and finally Fagin himself. Fagin’s later song, “Be Back Soon,” is solicitous of the boys’ welfare rather than nervous about exposure or being caught. The show’s opening number, “Food Glorious Food,” might just be the greatest celebration of pleasure in food, coming as it does from a chorus of

young boys starving in the workhouse and delivered to an audience with an active memory in 1960 of war-time and post-war food rationing. Bart's choral piece, "Who will buy?", which opens the second act of the musical, is another piece merging young Oliver's expressed need for love and family with the idea of Mr. Bumble's song, "Boy for Sale," and enclosing them within the welcoming calls of street traders (presumably another transfer from *Petticoat Lane* but this time influenced by similar choral effects from Gershwin's 1935 *Porgy and Bess*).

Stage musicals traditionally look for show-stoppers, songs that will have a musical life outside the drama, and in Nancy's "As Long as He Needs me" *Oliver!* has a classic torch-song. But other songs are so good that five or six others could lay claim to show-stopper status, including most of the songs mentioned above and Oliver's own keening "Where is Love?" An American master of musical theatre, Alan Jay Lerner, described *Oliver!* as "a score that could not have been improved upon" (219). Great music can transform a story; it can make dark light and light dark. Bart's *Oliver!* shares in the exuberance of Dickens's invention and Lean's visual stylings (themselves modelled on Cruikshank's illustrations) but supplements them with a certain cockney communality in the play's song and dance. At one point Nancy sings a song called "Um-Pa-pa," which is one of the show's weakest precisely because it does not do enough to hide its origins in pub-songs of the simple "Knees Up Mother Brown" variety. Bart's other great strength was his lyrics, which are in their rhyming and use of internal rhymes as great as any by the master Cole Porter. *Oliver!* ran for 2618 performances in London and 724 more in New York. It was revived in 1977 and 1982 for long London runs using the same sets and stagings that Sean Kenny designed, and the same musical arrangements as the original, and again transferred successfully to New York in 1984.

One man who most certainly had read Dickens was Sam Mendes, the director of the 1993 revival of *Oliver!* Mendes took the lead with the now elderly and infirm Lionel Bart in rewriting certain scenes, and providing new dialogue, notably the opening, where we now witness Oliver's traumatic birth. The staging was also palpably darker, as were the renderings of Fagin and Sykes, and there were new orchestral arrangements in order to chime in with the new theatrical styles made overwhelmingly popular by *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*. Mendes's new production ran for four years at the London Palladium, with multiple cast changes. It was essentially this same Mendes staging that was revived by Rupert Goold in 2008 and which ran for another three years at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. By the time Mendes had made over the piece in the 1990s, the

cockney musical was in truth something of an exercise in nostalgia; hence a subtle shift towards light opera treatment was warranted.

Success breeds success and *Oliver!* gave other artists the impetus to transform Dickens's works into musical theatre. Another creative East Ender, Wolf Mankowitz, came from a similar background to Lionel Be-gleiter, but he was much more closely identified with the craft of the street-vendor. Mankowitz had been the classic scholarship boy, lifted out of poverty and sent to Cambridge University. He wrote fiction and his first successes were novels dealing with a Jewish upbringing amid the tailors and market traders of the East End. *A Kid for Two Farthings* (1953) and *Make Me an Offer* (1955) were both made into popular films in the 1950s and the latter formed the basis for a stage musical, as did another Mankowitz tale about the early days of British pop music, *Expresso Bongo* (1959). Mankowitz was brought up in the house-clearance business and grew to be a leading expert and author on porcelains. He spent his childhood in Petticoat Lane, as did, a half a generation later, entrepreneur Alan Sugar—the founder of Amstrad computers. The most literate of the East End boys, Mankowitz was also a Dickensian by spirit and education in a way that Bart was not.

Mankowitz wrote the book for a musical based upon *Pickwick Papers*, and bandleader and composer Cyril Ornadel wrote the music for it. A third talent, Leslie Bricusse was engaged to write the lyrics. Both Mankowitz and Bricusse had been to Cambridge University and Ornadel was partly trained at the Royal College of Music (he was expelled when his father, who worked in the rag trade and who resented his son's desire to be a musician because he wanted him to take over the family business, betrayed his own son to the Principal for moonlighting in bands, against the RCM's rules). The Mankowitz-Ornadel-Bricusse musical was mounted and staged at the Saville Theatre in London in 1963, and ran for two years (or nearly 700 performances). During *Pickwick's* run, Mankowitz and Bricusse bought and opened a club in Newport Street Soho, called the Pickwick Club, which was a watering hole for actors, dancers, writers and musicians. *Pickwick* was more clearly a comic farce than *Oliver!*, as befits its source text. Unfortunately, it suffered from having few moments of emotional intensity; indeed, it had only one hit song, Mr. Pickwick's "If I Ruled the World." Bricusse, born south of the river in Wandsworth, but the one figure in this story who is not Jewish, being of mixed Belgian Huguenot and Irish origins, could not match the brio of Bart's patter songs nor could Ornadel match his melodies. Moreover, Dickensian whimsy was an educated taste that might succeed in its native Britain but it had to work

much harder abroad. Bricusse relates what happened when the show transferred to America in 1965:

We returned to New York for the Broadway opening of *Pickwick* at the 36th Street Theater. Then, and only then, did I witness the full horror of what [producer] Merrick had done to the show, and what Peter Coe, as director, had allowed him to do. Three or four anonymous new songs, with Americanised lyrics that displayed zero understanding of the style or cadence of Dickensian speech, in flagrant violation of our contractual rights, had been interpolated into the show. They had replaced perfectly good story songs and comedy songs, in the misguided hope of producing a long-shot show-stopper. What they produced instead was the opposite, a surefire show-closer. The storyline had become disjointed as a result of these intrusions, and even Harry Secombe's balanced central performance, which had always held the ship steady, had taken on a touch of discomfort and despair. (168)

This production befuddled its cast and audiences alike and closed after 56 performances. The musical, largely with its original cast, was successfully staged for BBC television and broadcast on 11 June 1969. It continues to exist, like the many productions of *Oliver!*, in the only form available, that of a successful cast album. At around the same time as the Mendes revamping of *Oliver!*, *Pickwick* was revived for the Chichester Festival Theatre season of 1993, from where it went on a national tour. The young Harry Secombe who had played Mr. Pickwick in 1963 now reprised the role somewhere nearer Mr. Pickwick's real age.

Following *Oliver!*, all musicals of Dickens pick out the main character as the eponymous hero of the story. *Pickwick* (1963) was followed by *Scrooge* in 1970. The only qualified success of *Pickwick* had deterred further efforts until the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Dickens's death. Leslie Bricusse took up the assignment on the basis of his successes, writing musicals for both stage and screen throughout the 1960s, including film musicals of *Dr Dolittle* (1967) and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1969). Film musicals at the end of the 1960s had the alarming tendency of casting non-singers in the key roles. Rex Harrison had developed a talky style of non-singing in *My Fair Lady* which he brought less memorably to *Dr Dolittle* but Peter O'Toole could not and does not really sing a note in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. Both of these films are put to shame by Carol Reed's film version of *Oliver!* Indeed, *Oliver Twist* is blessed on screen by being directed by the two greatest British directors of the post-war period, David Lean and Carol Reed. The former is famous for his visual flair and epic effects, and the latter for teasing great performances out of children.

Both are also rightly valued for their literary sensibilities. In addition, it was Reed who directed the 1955 version of Mankowitz’s autobiographical novel *A Kid for Two Farthings*, which featured largely untrained children in leading roles.

Bricusse’s *Scrooge* was to be written for the screen, and the gifted actor (but limited singer) Albert Finney was engaged to play him. The strength of *Scrooge* is essentially dramatic: it has a strong cast including the veteran of both Lean movies, Alec Guinness, as Jacob Marley, and is directed by another veteran, long-time Lean associate, Ronald Neame. In addition, it is a Christmas film and therefore it can tie many of its melodies to Christmas carols and other forms of traditional singing. Like *Pickwick*, it generated only one memorable song, “Thank You Very Much,” a cockneyfied tune sung ironically by members of the chorus which the unseen *Scrooge* imagines is some recognition of his worth but which is in fact gratitude for his timely dying. It opens out into a lively dance sequence and jolly funeral procession, in what is at best a homage to *Oliver!* and at worst a poor pastiche. The film did good business, opening at Radio City in New York for the 1970 Christmas season and does satisfactorily on television because Christmas-themed films have a special longevity irrespective of their quality. The score had an interesting afterlife however. It was recuperated by Bricusse in the early 1990s, again on the back of the Mendes revival of *Oliver!*, new songs were written and it reappeared as a stage musical produced seasonally throughout the 1990s. Anthony Newley, whose very successful career as a lounge singer on both sides of the Atlantic had gone into decline, made a popular comeback playing Scrooge in his old partner Bricusse’s musical. After Newley’s death, Lionel Bart’s old associate Tommy Steele took over the role.

At the time of Lionel Bart’s first great success, the only British partnership to compete with him were the team of Bricusse and Newley. Joking about the stranglehold of Jewish composers/lyricists on the stage musical, Bricusse and Newley always referred to their team as “Brickman and Newberg.” In fact, Anthony Newley was, like Joan Littlewood, illegitimate and raised by his Jewish mother in the East End. He escaped his poor Hackney upbringing by stage school, from whence he obtained the role of the Artful Dodger in Lean’s *Oliver Twist*. Thereafter he became a successful actor and recording artist. Brickman and Newberg’s *Stop the World—I Want to Get Off* (1961) and *The Roar of the Greasepaint—The Smell of the Crowd* (1965) were cockney musicals which were successful in London and on Broadway, and which threw up a number of popular songs covered by major American singers like Nina Simone, Sammy Davis Jr. and Tony Bennett. It is worth remembering that this was the time of

the early James Bond films (the themes for the first three of which were written by Bart, Norman, and Bricusse and Newley) and of the Beatles' breakthrough. Briefly, all things British were marketable.

Anthony Newley was the next composer to try to musicalize Dickens. He was engaged in 1974 to write the songs for a musical film of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. By 1974, the cockney wave had passed; even by the end of the 1960s it had become an object of derision as people had started making an affected display of their working class credentials, which provoked the coining of the term "mockney," as the swinging London phenomenon was seen to run out of energy. Originating movements like Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop had broken up in disarray. Perhaps its last great flowering was David Heneker's *Half a Sixpence* (1963–1965), a musical version of H. G. Wells's *Kipps*, which played to full houses in both London and New York in the mid-decade. The film version of 1967 has Bermondsey boy Tommy Steele act out the cockney dream of upward mobility, unsurprisingly showing the poor to be generous and carefree, and the rich to be snobbish and miserable. When Heneker went on to compose *Charley Girl* in 1965, a cockney musical which ran for six years in London, it was considered too risky to mount a New York production and it was never filmed. By this time, Lionel Bart's career had stalled and he was engulfed by bankruptcy, alcohol addiction and drug abuse. Into this unpropitious scenario came *The Old Curiosity Shop*, or *Mr. Quilp*, as it was titled in America.

The film is now something of a rarity. It was a Reader's Digest-financed initiative to produce wholesome family entertainment in the early 1970s, and suffers a little from this modest ambition. Newley's songs are mostly patter songs, dramatic in conception rather than sweepingly musical. But the problem is the conception of Quilp—is he comic or is he sinister? Newley follows the line developed by Ron Moody as Fagin and gives a bravura performance of comic energy. But Fagin's performance in *Oliver!* is balanced by the lyricism of Nancy and Oliver himself (it is unusual in being a musical that has three near equal leads). *Mr. Quilp* is something of a one-man-show, and the rest of the cast fail to engage. There is a second reason for the failure of this production. It is no accident that all good versions of musical Dickens are of novels from which successful films had already been made (the Lean films, the Alastair Sim *Christmas Carol* [1951], the 1952 *Pickwick Papers*). One suspects that to the theatre and movie-going public of the 1960s and 70s these films were better known than the books. Certainly Dickens musicals only attempted to incorporate plot elements known from the films. *Mr. Quilp*'s writers, Irene and Louis Kemp, had no familiar movie original to work from and so had to go back into

Dickens and fashion their own. This proved to be too much of a challenge, both for them and for their audience.

Shortly before Newley’s film went into production, there was a BBC Children’s television musical production of *Nicholas Nickleby*, called *Smike!* Produced by Paul Ciani and adapted by him in collaboration with John Morley, it was broadcast on Boxing Day 1973 as part of the BBC’s Christmas programming. A small professional cast of actors worked together with schoolchildren from Kingston Grammar School in a free adaptation that took contemporary children back to the conditions of Dotheboys Hall to learn to appreciate living in the twentieth century. The music was provided by Roger Holman and Simon May. This musical lasted only an hour, having a specific didactic purpose. Largely unconcerned about the rest of Dickens’s novel, it proved to be of little narrative or musical distinction. Most of its principals worked all their lives in children’s television, and only Simon May achieved any prominence, ironically as the co-author of the theme to the BBC’s long-running soap *EastEnders* (1985+).

The last cockney Dickens stage musical was an attempt to mount a production of *Great Expectations*, also in 1975. Cyril Ornelo tried to repeat the success of *Pickwick* more than ten years later, this time working with lyricist Hal Shaper. As ever, the musical followed the plot of the film, and cast Lean’s Pip, John Mills, an ever youthful 67-year-old, as Pip again. The musical played in the provinces at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford and then was taken on tour to Canada. But all attempts to find a West End home for the production failed and it was abandoned without ever being performed in London. Indeed, the record shows that quite a few musical versions of Dickens have been written and composed which have never been professionally mounted. The costs of setting up such a production, and its prospects for success, have been prohibitive. Since 1975, most attempts have been in America by Americans and in a more recognizably American idiom. The most successful of these was *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (later re-titled just *Drood*, 1985), with book, music and lyrics by Rupert Holmes. One might imagine that the author and performer of classic American pop hits like “Escape (the Pina Colada Song)” was American through and through but he was born “David Goldstein” in Northwich, England to a Jewish American bandleader father and English mother. *Drood* played 608 performances over two years at the Imperial Theater in New York, and then transferred for a further year to the Savoy Theatre in London. Dickens’s unfinished novel creates an opportunity for Holmes’s clever postmodern musical, which plays with a camp whodunit aesthetic and offers alternative endings.

At the end of the 1970s, two significant events took place which have had an enormous impact on Dickens on the stage. The first was the huge critical success of Trevor Nunn and John Caird's RSC stage version of *Nicholas Nickleby*, adapted by David Edgar. At 8 hours long, this production taught theatre to take *all* of Dickens seriously. Edgar describes what the guiding rule of the production was going to be: "we were going to adapt the whole of *Nicholas Nickleby*, or, at the very least, we were going to tell the whole story" (149). This purist comprehensive approach encapsulated the appropriation of Dickens by the educated establishment and the erosion of his position as a cockney talisman. Although coming from early comic Dickens, like most of the sources for the musicals, Nunn, Caird and Edgar darkened Dickens's *Nickleby* and made the treatment of Smike and the evil of Ralph Nickleby central. The second event was the movement of RSC professionals into the realm of the musical. To a lesser extent with *Cats*, but resoundingly with *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*, Nunn and Caird produced sophisticated stagings which gave emphasis to the musical's operatic pretensions. Heavier later Dickens accordingly fitted the bill. Post-1985, the year of *Les Misérables*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *A Tale of Two Cities* (inevitably) and *Great Expectations* were the texts to excite most new (and it must be said mostly unsuccessful) musical adaptations. Only *A Christmas Carol*, as an alternative to Christmas pantomime, could keep its place in this company. Bricusse's revival of Scrooge has been competing since the mid-1990s with an American version of *A Christmas Carol* by Lynn Ahrens and Alan Menken, staged annually at Madison Square Garden in New York in November and running through the Christmas season. This Ahrens-Menken version is the basis for the Hallmark musical film of *A Christmas Carol* released in 2003 and starring Kelsey Grammer. With the singular exception of Dickens's populist Christmas classic, one can see since the 1970s the Dickens of the people giving way to the more appreciated Dickens of the academy.

A postscript to the final phase of East End Dickens is the 13-part Yorkshire Television series, produced and directed by Marc Miller and written by Wolf Mankowitz, appropriately called *Dickens of London* (1976/77). This ran in the autumn of 1976 in England and in the summer of 1977 in the United States. Clearly a labour of love by Mankowitz, he produced a tie-in biography of Dickens to accompany the series, also entitled *Dickens of London* (1976). One does not have to work very hard to make the association between *Dickens and London*. There are dozens of books in print called *Dickens's London*, almost a parallel title to that of Victorian London. Another common title, *Dickens's England*, for in-

stance, was used by Michael Hardwick, an adviser to the TV series, in his 1970 publication, which was reissued in 1976 by the Book Club of America to prepare for the screening of the series (without directly competing with Mankowitz’s book). Michael Hardwick, along with his wife Mollie, was a prodigious producer of Dickens histories and reference works, from his *Dickens Companion* in 1965 to his *Dickens Encyclopedia* in 1973, *Dickens Quizbook* in 1974 and his novelization of the TV series *The Gaslight Boy* in 1976. When one considers that these books were re-edited and printed many times between 1965 and 1985, one can see the place of these works in the popular consumption of the Dickens legend, operating in parallel alongside other more academic appropriations of the writer. The Hardwicks also polished and expanded the Sherlock Holmes legend and moved in the waters of tie-ins for TV serializations of the period kind, including the ersatz *Upstairs Downstairs* (1971–75) television series.

In retrospect, Mankowitz’s series and book are not works of great originality or scholarship but the series is certainly of interest for other reasons. Stage actor Roy Dotrice plays both Charles and his father John Dickens. Indeed, the series is almost entirely about the relationship between Dickens and his father. Although a lot of the drama is in flashback, the reflections of the mature author, often while touring in America, the thirteenth and last episode concludes with the death of John Dickens. In other words, the main story only reaches 1851, just after the publication of *David Copperfield*. Early comic Dickens is all there, Dickens’s first autobiographical novel is finished, but the series comes to an end without equal attention paid to his later life or the compositions of his maturity. It seems fairly clear that the series was not hugely popular and was cancelled. Even a man as father-worshipping as Mankowitz (*Make Me an Offer* is clearly a tribute to his worldly street-trading father) would not have designed the series to finish at this point; the book *Dickens of London* for example is much better balanced in this respect. But the flashback structure gives inordinate attention to Dickens’s early life and youth, and Dotrice spends as much time in his make-up as John, opposite a child actor as Dickens, as he does as Charles. In using the same actor for both roles, Mankowitz is asserting an identity between the achieving protean son and the dreaming shiftless father. Indeed, we see the father urging his son to musical and dance performance at many phases of the series, moulding Charles Dickens as actor and performer in compensation for his own disappointments. With the series’ attention to the texture of nineteenth-century London life, it makes sense to see Dickens as an avatar for all poor-born but gifted Londoners who, with the help of

their relatives, have gone on to success. Indeed, Mankowitz writes about Dickens as a community hero, carrying the aspirations of his class. This, for example, is what he says about him in *Dickens of London*:

Of no one can it be more truly said than of Dickens that the child was father of the man. That is why his life reads like a novel.

The world of his childhood is vital in another sense to the understanding of his work. It was as a child that he heard, around him, the speech of people born in the eighteenth century, and he immersed himself in the classic novels of English literature, which deeply influenced him as a writer, especially in his earlier works. It is not just a question of picaresque constructions, but of the very tone of voice he adopts: the “mock verbosity,” in Angus Wilson’s phrase, reveling in parody, irony, hyperbole. Writing at the intersection of the Romantic-Regency epoch and the full-blown industrialism of the Victorian era, he brought to what are still, in essence, modern problems, the language of an earlier way of life in England. Like all the classic humorists, he was on the side of sanity against excess; and like them he fought excess with greater excess.

He was the first great writer to confront the social problems he saw around him, and he remains the poet of the politico-economic wasteland we still, unhappily, inhabit even though the abuses are not as vividly before our eyes as they were in Dickens’s time. (Mankowitz 244–45)

Mankowitz’s perspective is that Dickens was an avatar of London’s poor and disadvantaged in his life, and he was their spokesman in his work. His, and London’s, feelings about Dickens are further expressed in the biography’s final tribute:

He had wished for a quiet burial . . . What he got was a grave in Westminster Abbey . . .

The service was short, and ended with a dead march on the organ. Above the bell was tolling, and gradually London found out that Dickens was lying in Poets’ Corner, in a grave that would be left open for a few days. The grave was closed by the flowers thrown in until they overflowed. (246)

These were the sentiments of an assimilationist generation formed by a childhood during the Blitz, and by the late 1940s and 50s, a world

evoked in a slightly different register, for example, in the early plays of Harold Pinter, with their specific topographical references and celebration of London bus routes. The 60s and 70s saw the exodus of London’s Jewry, northward and westward, to other, plusher parts of London. The new East End saw immigrants from the sub-continent, for whom Dickens was not, at first, part of some wider pan-European process of assimilation but rather something largely of the host culture. This was the beginning of the emergence of a London of multiple self-affirming cultures, not of *pluribus unum*, the London of European Union cosmopolitanism, of political asylum and short-term economic migration, the London of the 7/7 bombings, the London to which the Olympic Games were awarded on the basis of it being a city of all the world. “Consider yourself one of us” had and has a quite different meaning for these Londoners.

APPENDIX: DICKENS’S FICTION—A SELECTED LIST OF MUSICAL PRODUCTIONS

1. *Oliver* (1960): book, music and lyrics by Lionel Bart (born “Lionel Begleiter,” Stepney)
(1960–67) New Theatre, London, dir. Peter Coe; 2,618 performances
(1963–65) Schubert/Mark Beck Theatres, New York; 724 performances
(1968) film, dir. Carol Reed (Best Film, Best Director Oscars)
(1977–79) London revival, Albery Theatre, dir. Peter Coe
(1982–83) 2nd London revival, Aldwych Theatre
(1984) New York transfer, Mark Hellinger Theatre
(1994–98) 3rd London revival, London Palladium, dir. Sam Mendes
(2003–05) USA tour, most major US (and some Australian) venues
(2008–11) 4th London revival, Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, dir. Rupert Gold
2. *Pickwick* (1963): book by Wolf Mankowitz (born Spitalfields), music by Cyril Ornadel (born Whitechapel), lyrics by Leslie Bricusse (born Wandsworth)
(1963–65) Saville Theatre, London, dir. Peter Coe; 694 performances
(1965) 46th Street Theatre, New York; 56 performances
(1969) BBC television production, 11th June, dir. Terry Hughes
(1993) revival, Chichester Festival Theatre, and national tour
3. *Scrooge* (1970): book, music and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse
(1970) film, dir. Ronald Neame
(1992–96) adapted stage musical, Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham and on tour, starring Anthony Newley

- (2003–05) annual Christmas revival tour, starring Tommy Steele (born Bermondsey)
4. *Smike!* (1973): BBC Children's Television adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* by Paul Ciani and John Morley, music by Roger Holman and Simon May, broadcast on Boxing Day 1973 (60 minutes)
 5. *The Old Curiosity Shop/Mr. Quilp* (1975): book by Irene and Louis Kamp, music and lyrics by Anthony Newley (born Hackney)
(1974/75) film release in UK as *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Reader's Digest production)
(1975) film release in USA as *Mr. Quilp*, dir. Michael Tuchner
 6. *Great Expectations* (1975): book and lyrics by Hal Shaper, music by Cyril Ornadel
(1975) Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford and tour of Canada, with John Mills
 7. *Copperfield* (1981): music and lyrics by Al Kasha and Joel Hirschhorn (1981) ANTA Theater; 39 performances
 8. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood/Drood* (1985): book, music and lyrics by Rupert Holmes (born "David Goldstein," Northwich, UK)
(1985–87) Imperial Theatre, New York; 608 performances
(1987–88) transfer, Savoy Theatre, London
 9. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1985): book by Greg Peterson, music and lyrics by Larry Nestor; no professional performance recorded
 10. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1990): book by Dave Ross and Vivienne Carter, music and lyrics by Dave Ross, Neil Parker and Michael Mullane only amateur Thameside Youth Theatre production
 11. *A Christmas Carol* (1994): book by Lynn Ahrens, music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens
(1994–2003) seasonal production at the Paramount Theatre, Madison Square Garden, New York, dir. Mike Ockrent (born Highgate)
(2004) film, dir. Arthur Seidelman (Hallmark films), starring Kelsey Grammer
 12. *A Tale of Two Cities* (2008): book, music and lyrics by Jill Santoriello (2008) Hirschfield Theatre, New York; 61 performances
 13. *Great Expectations* (2009): book by Steve Lozier and Brian Van der Walt, music by Richard Winzeler and lyrics by Steve Lane (2009) performed at the Utah Shakespeare Festival; 60 performances
 14. *Copperfield and Co.* (?): an unperformed musical by Frank Kirwan

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The Paramount Role of Translation in Modern Opera Productions

ABSTRACT

Opera is undoubtedly a particularly high and traditional genre of art, but recently there have been numerous attempts at breaking this stereotype and presenting opera in a contemporary light. The most popular way of achieving this aim is either staging modernized opera productions, i.e. transferring their plot from their traditional setting to the here and now, or considerably changing their interpretation. Staging modernized productions involves, first of all, the issue of stage design, and an alteration in the traditional interpretation is mostly created by acting, but nowadays it is also the translation shown in the form of surtitles that creates the significance of operatic productions.

Keywords: opera, libretto, translation, surtitles, visibility.

The importance of operatic translation is very rarely recognized, but in a number of non-standard productions it is one of the most essential elements. Lawrence Venuti claims that translators and translations are still too invisible, but contemporary surtitlers definitely do not cease to improve upon their work's visibility. Depending on the operatic director's concept, the surtitles may either slightly shape the interpretation of the production, or diverge considerably from the original libretto sung by the singers. In such extreme cases these translations are usually adjusted to the action taking place on the stage, and they are a vivid example of rewriting. Subsequently, they may be considered as manipulative, but it is also true that in today postmodernist operatic theatre they are the most significant element that binds together the original libretto and modern concept of the director.

Translation has been connected with opera from the very beginning of the genre, and throughout the centuries, answering the needs and wishes of the audiences, it has adopted different methods and trends. Nowadays the vast majority of opera houses provides their audiences with libretti translation in the form of surtitles. The very term *surtitles* describes the translated text, which, contrary to subtitles shown at the bottom of the television or cinema screen, is displayed on an electronic screen above the stage. This type of translation is very popular among the audiences, who do not hesitate to express their dissatisfaction if opera houses fail to provide surtitles during the performances.

Regardless of the audiences' opinions, surtitles are still considered to be a mere addition to the performance. It is undoubtedly true that translation usually plays a secondary role in opera, as, first of all, it needs to guide the viewers smoothly through the performance. However, nowadays there are more and more opera productions that are either modernized, or considerably altered in interpretation. If they are to be successful and complete productions, they definitely need proper libretti translation. Drawing on Lawrence Venuti's concept of translators' visibility, I would like to argue that in modern operatic productions surtitles should play a dominant role and be a crucial element of creating a new modern interpretation.

At the beginning I would like to briefly present the trends in staging and translating opera, as modern opera productions and translations are the result of changing tendencies in operatic theatre. The craft of staging operas has always been significant for this genre because in opera the visual aspect is just as important as music and singing. The first treatise concerning the subject of stagecraft, *Il corago*, was written in Florence in the first half of the 17th century. Created by an anonymous author writing from the point of view of a person supervising theatrical productions, it

contains a number of instructions and rules concerning staging and acting in opera (Savage 367). For a very long time, particularly at an opera première, it was the composer, who was one of those responsible for the staging; however, if the work was later staged in another theatre, the institution's musical director was most often appointed as the one in charge of the new production. His role strengthened considerably in the 19th century, but the next century witnessed the opera directors taking over the responsibility of staging new productions (Savage 389–90).

Whether rather conservative or more daring, up to the 20th century operatic productions used to follow the content of the libretti and its stage directions; but then everything changed. Some of the first operas which were staged as unprecedented extraordinary productions were the works of Richard Wagner. His operas are full of fantasy, symbolism and allegory, which is a good basis for reinterpretation and uncovering new meanings.

Interestingly, the turn of the 20th century was also the point when the importance of the translation in opera increased. Up to that time the vast majority of operas were sung in Italian, as Italy was the most significant country for opera. If the non-Italian speaking audience wanted to understand exactly what was happening in the opera they were watching, they had to follow printed libretti during the performance, which was certainly impractical and it diverted their attention from the very performance.¹ In the 19th and 20th centuries most operas were performed with their libretti sung in the language of the country where the production was staged; according to Lucile Desblache, there were two reasons for it: “the first was the emergence of strong national identities in Europe expressed in all artistic forms, including music; the second was the trend towards more realistic operas, less mythological texts . . .” (163). However, translating a libretto for singing brings with itself a number of problems and challenges, and the result was usually incomparable to the original. That is why opera houses started introducing surtitles invented by John Leberg and Lotfi Mansouri, who were respectively the technical and the general directors of the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto. The first opera performance with surtitles—*Elektra* by Richard Strauss—took place on October 21, 1983 in Toronto. However, it should be mentioned that live translation had already been known earlier in China, as at the beginning of the 1980s some of the Chinese opera houses used to show translation vertically next to the stage (Dubiski 208–09). Yet, before surtitles became popular and widely used, a great number of stage directors were strongly against them, claiming that

¹ Nevertheless, it was possible because, unlike today, until late 19th century theatre halls were illuminated throughout the whole performances (Desblache 162).

they spoil the special atmosphere of opera houses. James Levine, the artistic director of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, said that they would be introduced there only “over his dead body” (Tommasini). Nonetheless, he finally changed his mind, and the Metropolitan Opera’s seatback titles—*Met Titles*—were introduced in 1995 for a rehearsal of *Madama Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini (Kozinn).

The emergence of surtitles coincided with the domination of opera revivals and it became obvious that if the production were to be successful, it would have to be absorbing both audibly and visually. Subsequently, to meet the audience’s wishes stage directors had to adjust the productions to the contemporary viewer. It is also evident that directors have become fascinated with the newest achievements of technology, and a great amount of sophisticated lighting, lasers, machinery and screens is frequently present on stage today. This has all led to various new interpretations and extraordinary or surprising staging.

The 21st century has already witnessed many unusual and modernized opera productions and there are certainly a few reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, even more than in the 20th century, the contemporary viewers have many ways of seeing a particular opera staged in different productions: they can go to an opera house, see a broadcast in the cinema or simply buy a DVD record. Therefore, opera directors and producers work towards creating productions that will draw attention of those who have already seen many productions of the same work. Moreover, in order to make a mark on their artistic work, numerous stage directors resort to applying more and more extraordinary ideas which will gain renown in the media and bring commercial success. Producing an opera is also undeniably very costly: providing the scenery, props and costumes for all the cast and choir of the opera which, for instance, is set originally in Antiquity or at an 18th century court usually proves to be highly expensive. Therefore, particularly in smaller opera houses which operate on tight budget, stage directors sometimes decide to modernize them and, in consequence, the performers may be dressed in contemporary clothes and the stage design is often considerably simplified. In addition, it is considerably easier to stage a modernized opera production than a traditional one. In order to produce a good production with original and traditional stage design, the director must possess great expertise in the epoch of the original setting: the costumes, interiors, customs or, for example, dances must all be in agreement with the epoch. However, even though the holistic approach to the performance is always significant, in case of staging a non-standard, i.e. modernized or reinterpreted, opera production, it is particularly necessary.

First of all, it needs to be emphasized that modernizing and altering interpretations should not depend only on acting and stage design, but also on translation. As I have stated in the introduction, nowadays almost all opera houses provide their audiences with surtitles displayed on a screen above the stage. Unfortunately, very often the quality of surtitles leaves a lot to be desired, simply because those translations tend to be too detailed. Translation shown in the form of surtitles should not be very faithful because operatic libretti tend to be highly complex: they are full of sophisticated words, flowery style and refined grammar constructions. The viewers should not be expected to focus on the surtitles too much (if they are unclear, the viewers often refuse to read them), so the language of the translation should be relatively simple. Repetitions of words or even whole passages of arias should not be included in translation, though sometimes it is useful to add some personal pronoun or a name in order to render the plot clear. According to Jonathan Burton, “the aim of surtitles is to convey the meaning of what is being sung, not necessarily the manner in which it is being sung” (62). It is important to remember that the audience comes to the opera house to see and listen to the performance rather than focus their whole attention on the surtitles.

In modernized opera productions the task of translation is quite complicated. Such productions very often differ considerably from the original staging and do not follow stage directions very closely, so the translators may either stay faithful to the text and produce a disharmony between the titles and the production, or they may adjust the text to the production, with the changes very often being substantial. Similarly in case of operatic productions the interpretation of which has been altered by the director. The clash between the action taking place on the stage and text shown on the screen above the stage would certainly be very confusing for the viewers.

It is interesting to notice, though, that sometimes the interpretation depends on translation rather than on acting. In such cases the surtitles may shape the meaning of a specific situation or character, and present them in a more favourable or disapproving way, different from the standard interpretation. David McVicar’s 2009 production of *Il Trovatore* by Giuseppe Verdi staged in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York is a good example here. The libretto and, consequently, the plot of this opera are famous for being highly complex and obscure; that is why directors sometimes attempt to shape the action. Sample 1 below presents Leonora’s cabaletta from act IV and the translation provided by the Metropolitan Opera House:

Sample 1		
Original Italian libretto	Exact English translation (translation mine)	Translation provided by the opera house
LEONORA		
Tu vedrai che amore in terra Mai del mio non fu più forte: Vinse il fato in aspra guerra, Vincerà la stessa morte.	You will see that the earth Has never witnessed love greater than mine. It defeated fate in a fierce war, It will overcome the very death.	You shall see that my devotion Is unmatched by any other.
O col prezzo di mia vita La tua vita salverò, O con te per sempre unita Nella tomba scenderò!	I will either save you At the cost of my life, Or I will descend to the tomb Eternally united with you!	I will risk my life to save you. And we two shall live together Or unite at last in death!

This cabaletta confirms that the libretto of *Il Trovatore* is indeed obscure and it is not free of violent imagery. The titles provided by the opera house change this concept considerably: in the original Leonora is convinced that she would die, and she imagines herself descending to the tomb. The translation, however, implies that there is the ray of hope: “And we two shall live together.” If that does not happen, she and her beloved will “unite at last in death,” which is certainly a much more romantic image, especially because it presents the lovers together. The translator also omitted three lines probably irrelevant for the production. This example proves that even without changing the acting, the interpretation may be shaped by the very surtitles.

Even though the translation above is not a faithful one, it does not diverge considerably from the original text and it is known that the production was fairly traditional, as well. If staging non-standard productions is considered to be controversial, then adjusting libretti translations to such productions is contentious, as well. Translations very often vary substantially from the origi-

nal libretto and in extreme cases they may be different not only in terms of the meaning, but also in form. The main point of controversy lies, however, in the fact that the original libretto is still very much present on the stage, as the singers almost always sing the original libretto with no alterations. If the opera is sung in a foreign language, the vast majority of the audience do not understand it and that is the reason why surtitles are indispensable. The viewers can hear the original, but, unaware of its meaning, they read the translation, to follow the action. It would probably not be exaggeration to claim that in such cases the audience is manipulated. It is certainly true that some part of the audience is either familiar with the language of the libretto or simply knows the text of the libretto very well, and they can notice the difference between the original and the translation, but the function of surtitles in non-standard productions consists evidently in both presenting and shaping the meaning of the original.

The issue of shaping libretti in translation is closely connected with the concept of visibility and invisibility of translators. Raised by Lawrence Venuti in his famous work *The Translator's Invisibility. The History of Translation* published in 1995, this subject is still very much valid. It can even be argued that these days it is even more valid than before because the post-modern era has redefined the question of the original and the author. Venuti claims that the role of translators is too often invisible, which is the result of both cultural trends and “the individualistic conception of authorship that continues to prevail” (6). This concept is significant for operatic translation, as well. Surtitles are still considered as a minor element of opera performance: on the one hand, they should provide the audience with the translation, but on the other hand, the audience should not pay much attention to them. In such cases the surtitler becomes indeed invisible because, as Venuti claims, “[u]nder the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his translation ‘invisible,’ producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion . . .” (5). The surtitles are traditionally expected to be as fluent and unobtrusive as possible.

However, modern translations adjusted to non-standard productions strongly defy this view. In 2007 Lucile Desblache touched upon this subject in her essay “Music to My Ears,” asserting that the role of the visibility of surtitles is rising, but she did not pursue the subject (165). Today there seems to be more and more surtitlers, who do not hesitate to assert their role and make their translation visible. Obviously, the visibility of the surtitles should be of a double, literal and non-literal, nature: first of all, the libretti translators always need to be credited in the opera programmes, and the surtitles screens should not be placed too high above the stage as a marginal element. But the non-literal aspect of the surtitles’ visibility, consisting in the very content, is equally significant. Not only may sur-

titles contain jokes or plays on words, which sometimes are considered irrelevant in this kind of translation, but they can also influence the productions' reception to a great extent. It is particularly interesting as non-standard productions very often diverge from the content of the libretto, even though the singers always sing the original version. Subsequently, the stage design and singers' acting may not agree with the libretto and it is the translation that binds them and supports the whole production. When the translation is strongly adjusted to extraordinary productions and becomes a crucial part of this production, its visibility can no longer be denied.

It needs to be emphasized that nowadays the issue of visibility of translators and translation should not be ignored, particularly because the basis for theatre, including operatic theatre, is the interpretation which depends on every individual taking part in the production. At this point it is useful to bring in Jacques Derrida, who claimed that translation is a proof that there is no individual and original meaning:

Difference is never pure, no more is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. We will never have, and in fact never had, to do with some "transport" of ur-signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched. (qtd. in Bassnett 11–12)

Derrida's claim shows explicitly that the notion of translation and original is changing; focusing on one interpretation is groundless and it would advocate the word-for-word translation. Such a claim can also be seen in the concept of *différance*, one of Derrida's central points of deconstruction, which presents the special relationship between the text and the meaning. The alteration of just one letter in the French word *différence* (Eng. "difference") shows that the *différance* between two differences or letters does not lie in the voice or written signs, but in the space between the words and writing (Derrida 378). It consists in the possibility of terminology, process and system (386), so it allows for the possibility of various ways of filling the aforementioned space, which, in this case, would be the possibility of diverse operatic libretti translations.

Lawrence Venuti also claims that meaning is not fixed and that the original can be translated in many rather than only one specific manner:

Both foreign text and translation are derivative: both consist of diverse linguistic and cultural materials that neither the foreign writer

nor the translator originates, and that destabilize the work of signification, inevitably exceeding and possibly conflicting with their intentions. As a result, a foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation. . . . Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence, and therefore a translation cannot be judged according to mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one-to-one correspondence. (18)

There cannot be one perfect and ideal version of surtitles, as there cannot be one perfect version of any translation. Desblache very clearly argues that “the interpretation of operatic text is not exclusively bound to text but also largely depends on visual, musical and emotional elements present through each performance” (165). Thus, the translation is inextricably connected with the director’s interpretation and, subsequently, the operatic production.

The visibility of translators and translation, however, brings with itself great changes and the relation between the original libretto and translation may be blurred, which may be considered as undesirable. It is, nevertheless, significant to remember that “[t]ranslation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text” (Lefevere vii). André Lefevere insists that when we translate, we rewrite the original. In other words: we write it anew. It brings both advantages and disadvantages, but it is unavoidable. Moreover, if “the non-professional reader increasingly does not read literature as written by its writers, but as rewritten by its rewriters” (Lefevere 4), then translators create specific images of specific texts, and, subsequently, very often manipulate them (9). In opera the surtitles also create certain images of the texts, and, even though the audience hears the original libretti, they read the text rewritten by the translator, who, depending on the production, may be more or less visible. Lefevere defines rewriting as “the motor force behind literary evolution” (2), so it is possible to pose the questions: is rewriting the motor force behind opera revolution? Is emphasizing the visibility of operatic translation the motor force behind opera revolution? The examples I would like to provide prove that the answers for both questions are undeniably affirmative.

It can be safely assumed that if surtitles influence the reception of non-standard productions to a large extent, they are certainly not invisible. An interesting example is *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart directed by Kasper Holten and staged in 2014 by the Royal Opera House. This extraordinary production, set in the Victorian era, is in fact a psychodrama, presenting the psychological portrait of Don Giovanni. He still is a renowned and ruthless seducer, but this image certainly draws on Lord Byron’s romantic vision of this character. Mozart’s opera originally begins with a powerful scene when

Don Giovanni, having tried to seduce Donna Anna, tries to escape from her father's house without revealing his identity. However, in Holten's production Don Giovanni and Donna Anna are lovers. Let us look at the original libretto and translation provided by the opera house in the form of surtitles:

Sample 2

Original Italian libretto	Exact English translation (my translation)	Translation provided by the opera house
DONNA ANNA		
Non sperar, se non m'uccidi, Ch'io ti lasci fuggir mai!	Have no hope, I will never let you go, First you would have to kill me!	I'll never let you go!
DON GIOVANNI		
Donna folle, indarno gridi! Chi son io tu non saprai, No, tu non saprai.	Stupid woman, you scream in vain! You will never know who I am.	You silly girl, you don't know me!
DONNA ANNA		
Gente! Servi! Al traditore!	Help me, servants! The betrayer!	Someone come and help me!
DON GIOVANNI		
Taci, e trema al mio furore!	Silence, fear my fury!	You'd better keep quiet.
DONNA ANNA		
Scellerato!	Villain!	You're bad.
DON GIOVANNI		
Sconsigliata!	Fool!	And so are you.

The singers are singing the original libretto, but their acting imposes a different interpretation, as at the beginning of this production Don Giovanni carelessly emerges from the bedroom of Donna Anna who is clearly reluctant to bid her lover farewell. The translation intensifies this surprising scene. It needs to be noticed that this translation is not considerably different from the original in terms of meaning, but a number of concepts are omitted or changed; the significance of most phrases is altered by using words similar in meaning but with a different emotional significance. Translating the exclamations *Scellerato!* and *Sconsigliata!* as, respectively, “You are bad” and “So are you,” and combining them with singers’ explicit acting results in creating a provocative, erotic scene—the opposition of the traditional beginning of *Don Giovanni*. Such a scene is undoubtedly not expected by the viewers and if the translation were not adjusted to the production, the effect would be both confusing and incomplete.

Don Giovanni is an opera that is often modernized nowadays, as it is not very closely bound to specific time or culture. The situation is remarkably different when the libretto is deeply rooted in a specific time and place. *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti is a good example. Based on Walter Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor*, this work is originally set in the 18th century Scotland. Lucia is a sister of Lord Enrico Ashton, the lord of Lammermoor, and her fiancé is Sir Edgardo Ravenswood. This opera is very rarely modernized: most directors set it, as Gaetano Donizetti did, in the 18th century, and the viewers are usually presented with a conventional set comprising of a castle, cemetery, moors and woods. However, in the 2015 production of the Bavarian State Opera directed by Barbara Wysocka, the plot takes place in the middle of the 20th century in the United States. Enrico is a politician, Lucia is modelled on Jackie Kennedy and Edgardo appears as a rebel modelled on James Dean, and drives a white convertible. Such an update was done “on the one hand, to show the balance of powers behind *Lucia* in modern times, and, on the other, to present the traditional patriarchal structures” (Hettinger, my translation).

The libretto of *Lucia di Lammermoor* contains numerous references to Scottish history or to the places (e.g., castle or cemetery) in which the story is set. Therefore, it is difficult to translate the libretto so that it is adjusted to a modernized production. An example of the adjustment introduced in the surtitles is the scene when Enrico tries to persuade Lucia to marry the man he has chosen for her. In the libretto he mentions historical figures, namely British monarchs Mary II and William III, but the translation generalizes this utterance, so that it can relate to the 20th century reality:

Sample 3

Original Italian libretto	Exact English translation (my translation)	Translation provided by the opera house
ENRICO		
M'odi. Spento è Guglielmo – ascendere vedremo in trono Maria . . .	Listen. William is dead, we will see Mary ascend the throne.	A change of government takes place.

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Such direct verbal changes are not the only way to serve a more modern production. There are also a few parts of the translation which generally create the effect of modernity. Therefore, the original line *Giorni d'amaro pianto s'apprestano per te* (Eng. “Days of bitter weeping await you”) which is sung by one of the characters is translated for the audience as “Days of bitter tears are in store for you”; and the original *Di ragon la trasse amore* (Eng. “Love deprived her of her reason”) is presented in the titles as “Love robbed her of her reason.” The register of the phrases “to be in store” and “to rob somebody of something” is only slightly less formal than the register of the original phrases, and, at the same time, this more contemporary use of language helps to create the effect of the 20th-century setting.

The translations shown above diverge from the original, but they are still in close relation with what the singers are singing on stage. There are, however, surtitles which have very little in common with the original libretto and cannot be defined as invisible. An interesting example is Charles Gounod's *Faust* staged by the Metropolitan Opera House and directed by Des McAnuff in 2011. Based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust, Part 1*, it is originally set in the 16th century, but McAnuff updated the story to the 20th century: his Faust is a scientist working on an atomic bomb. Because there are a few moments in which the production diverges from the original French libretto, the translation seen by the audience must have been considerably adjusted. The first change is visible when Méphistophélès visits Faust for the first time in his laboratory. Méphistophélès is dressed according to contemporary fashion, but in the original libretto sung onstage he describes to Faust his traditional outfit: cloak, hat with a feather and sword. At the same time, the audience receives a different version in the translation, adapted to what they actually see. Here is the text of the libretto and the translation:

Sample 4

Original French libretto	Exact English translation (my translation)	Translation provided by the opera house
MÉPHISTOPHÉLÈS		
Me voici! – D’où vient ta surprise? Ne suis-je pas mis à ta guise? L’épée au côté, la plume au chapeau, L’escarcelle pleine, un riche manteau Surl’épaule – en somme Un vrai gentilhomme!	Here I am! Are you surprised? You dislike my dress? My sword, a feather in my hat, Money in my pouch and my rich cloak. All in all, a true gentleman.	Here I am! Why are you so surprised? I’m not what you expected? With the cane and panama hat, Dressed to the nines . . . Altogether: a real gentleman.

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As a result, what can be seen on the stage diverges considerably from what the bass playing the role of the devil is singing. Méphistophélès is singing about his sword, cloak and a feather in his hat, but the audience does not see these objects; instead, they are presented with a cane, panama hat and suit. The translation presented to the viewers is adjusted to the production, and that is why the original “My sword, feather in my hat / Money in my pouch and my rich cloak” is translated as “the cane and panama hat, dressed to the nines.” It is the translation that helps the director’s bold concept integrate with the libretto; its visibility is therefore one of the crucial elements of the production: it is certainly not less important than the stage design or acting.

In conclusion, it should be stressed once more that the issue of opera titling is not usually a priority in the whole enterprise of staging an opera production. The interpretation and significance of particular productions are created not only by the use of words, but also by various visual elements, namely stage design and acting. Subsequently, it is the reason why the best opera houses employ the most imaginative directors and the most outstanding singers who also possess remarkable acting skills. It has become particularly essential today, when, thanks to live broadcast, the audience can see the close-ups and expects to enjoy not only a work of purely musical value, but something like the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Irrespective of various interpretations and staging, the singers almost always sing the original

libretti. The 16th-century Faust may be constructing a nuclear weapon and the 18th-century Scottish aristocrats may be driving white convertibles, but the original text never changes. What may be altered, however, is the translation in the target language.

André Lefevere argued that translation is “the most obvious rewriting of all” (10) and, in fact, modern surtitling confirms that claim. The original libretto is rewritten and the audience receives a certain image that the director and the translator intend them to receive. Therefore, by adjusting translations to particular productions and emphasizing their role, the translators make their work more visible, both literally and non-literally. In many cases, for example in literature, such drastic changes would be most probably questionable or even unacceptable, but in non-standard operatic productions the visibility of translation is both desirable and acceptable. According to Susan Bassnett, it is essential to “recognize the role they [translators] play in reshaping texts, a role that is far from innocent, and is very visible indeed” (23).

Translating libretti is definitely a difficult task and that is why there are so many imperfect titles. In order to do it successfully, one needs “not only a wide range of linguistic and musical skills but also . . . in-depth knowledge of operatic cultural background and an artistic sensitivity” (Desblache 169). The coexistence and cooperation of translational skills and classical music expertise are therefore indispensable elements of achieving the goal of successful titles. Moreover, because of the high genre of opera, creating surtitles gains a special character, as well: “[t]he titling of opera is not only a craft, but also an art” (Burton 69). It is true that the very idea of modernizing operas “is a staple of opera directors today, especially in Europe, and it sparks feuds between traditionalists and updaters as regularly as the sun rises” (Wakin), but this trend is definitely here to stay, so it requires special translation of the operas’ libretti. Creating titles for such productions is definitely difficult, but it is also even more challenging and interesting. As this paper has shown, there are different kinds of adjusting the translations to the productions; for instance, *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Barbara Wysocka is an example of a moderately adapted translation, and *Faust* by Des McAnuff is definitely an extreme case. However, all of the modernized productions described here demonstrate the power of opera translation: translation that should not be regarded as only a marginal element of operatic production, but rather as its crucial and defining part.

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Drama is for Life! Recreational Drama Activities for the Elderly in the UK

ABSTRACT

Applied Theatre is an inclusive term used to host a variety of powerful, community-based participatory processes and educational practices. Historically, Applied Theatre practices include Theatre-in-Education (TiE), Theatre-in-Health Education (THE), Theatre for Development (TfD), prison theatre, community theatre, theatre for conflict resolution/reconciliation, reminiscence theatre with elderly people, theatre in museums, galleries and heritage centres, theatre at historic sites, and more recently, theatre in hospitals. In this paper we are positioning the application of recreational dramatic activities with older adults (55+) under Applied Theatre and we are exploring the benefits they offer to the participants. We are concerned that their health and wellbeing in western societies is not prioritized and it is clear that loneliness in particular is a current and ongoing issue. We will present research results from a drama dissertation study that took place in a community hall in the South East England where drama is placed at the core of their practice with old populations. Data was collected by a mixed method (semi-structured interviews and semi-immersive observations) and was critically discussed amongst the authors to conclude that attending recreational drama classes brings a certain degree of happiness, social belonging and improvement of interaction with others to old people's lives.

Keywords: Applied Theatre, wellbeing, community.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to discuss recreational drama activities with older adults in the community in the United Kingdom and consider whether this kind of work can affect participant's socialization, physicality and general mood. It presents an undergraduate drama dissertation study with Newman University Birmingham (United Kingdom) that is examining the work of *Fallen Angels*, a recreational drama group based in Greater London that introduces creative drama classes with older adults in a community hall.

In 2013 the health secretary of the UK, Jeremy Hunt, highlighted the increasing numbers of lonely elderly people in society today. In what Hunt described as a national shame, up to 800,000 people in the UK are classed as chronically lonely (BBC). In Hunt's speech he expressed that the issue could be helped by UK citizens taking care of their elderly relatives and making a conscious effort to visit and to contact them more regularly (BBC). Hunt went on to voice concerns that loneliness can result in physical illness such as blood clots and heart disease. Alongside Hunt's concerns, the BBC webpage also lists potential mental side effects of feeling lonely, including an increase of bad habits, depression and poor eating. Pitkala et al. states that loneliness can be associated with impaired quality of life, cognitive decline and poor subjective health (792–800). It is also noted that loneliness often results in an increased use of health and social services. Rona Dury describes loneliness or emotional isolation as "subjective, involving feelings of loss of companionship" (125). She also suggests that older adults are particularly susceptible to loneliness due to changes in their lifestyle for example the loss of a spouse or adapting to retirement. In addition to these incentives, the Baring Foundation Report (2009) acknowledges that isolation (less than weekly contact with anybody else) is a current issue in the UK and that there is a need for a better quality of life for old people. The report states that creative and participatory work could have benefits for older adults, including forging friendships and socialization. Isolation and loneliness is one of several issues that many older adults are facing in society today. This paper aims to explore whether applications of drama activities in communities of older adults could have a positive effect on the UK's aging community. Could participation in drama decrease the feeling of loneliness and isolation in our aging community? We use Applied Theatre (AT) as a broad theoretical and practical base to this investigation. AT is often supportive of certain unforeseen needs within society. We have considered that the needs and demands of communities and the theatrical applications that take place in care homes hold a deeper meaning at the heart of the art form and the hearts of the participants. With passion to discover a deeper

meaning and purpose of drama practice in old people's lives, we investigate whether dramatic activities and theatrical interventions with older adults can positively affect the lives of the participants.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Applied Theatre is an umbrella term to describe a range of theatrical interventions, including performances, workshops and dramatic activities that happen either *for* or *with* groups of people in places they inhabit and where they socialize. Theatre applications in the community involve non-traditional audiences such as school children, patients in hospitals and hospices, old people in care homes, visitors in heritage sites and prisoners or ex-offenders in non-traditional "theatrical" and sometimes most unusual and alternative venues which are located outside the main theatre. Prentki and Preston describe Applied Theatre as an unconventional practice that is relatable for ordinary people. The dramatic conventions that apply in drama (space, time, characterization etc.) can be rearranged, leaving the overall product somewhat avant-garde. The dynamics of the practice are interchangeable to suit practitioners, participants and audience's needs, interests and preferences. This is appealing as it means creative freedom for practitioners and individuals that are involved, and opportunities for theatrical experimentation in practice. Because Applied Theatre often has a specific resonance with the participants and/or the audience, people are at the heart of its practice. At its best, the audience is highly motivated to participate in the process of drama and performance at various levels. The process may involve research about a topic of the group's interests, story-collecting from the participants and story-telling/making sessions, theatre games, body and language improvisations, devising a play, characterization, and staging a show. The content of activities often holds a special meaning at the heart of the people involved, as for example in work with older adults; the stories of elderly people become the inspiration and material for drama. Dramatic activities with older adults could be performed by actors or sometimes by the elderly people themselves supported by their care givers (especially if an old participant has mobility problems), or both, in residential care homes and hospices or in community centres where people meet on a regular weekly basis.

Fallen Angels was established in 1996 and used to have a different name. However, after eight years of running, the group lost their council funding and have since been dependent on charity donations and attendance fees. This financial change in 2003 inspired the company to transform their name as a means for a new start. The group of older adults meets once a week for two hours on Thursday afternoons. The aim of the group

is for all that attend to have fun and for them to gain drama and acting skills along the way (Sleigh). They devise pieces of drama, however keeping with the aim that the sessions are made to be enjoyable, participants have complete ownership over whether they would like to share their work with the rest of the group or outsiders. Due to the financial struggles that the group has faced over the years, each member pays an admission fee of £8 a session which equates to £96 per term (*Fallen Angels*). *Fallen Angels* is constantly proving that participatory drama work is well within the capabilities of the elderly.

Storytelling is at the heart of the work produced by *Fallen Angels*. Paula Crimmens facilitates storytelling and creative drama classes with older adults. In her book, Crimmens discusses the reasons for constructing work in groups rather than on an individual basis. She expresses that as we get older, we often become less active and socially able. There are fewer social encounters and this can be a great cause of loneliness. Drama group work is an opportunity to feel part of a community and to socialize with others. Crimmens insists that the group work has the power to stimulate the participants and reduce boredom. She notes that participants enjoy themselves during her sessions and their self-esteem often improves. Crimmens continues that all of these are ideal and very possible outcomes of drama group work with the elderly. Reverting back to Hunt's speech (BBC), the extreme loneliness of elderly people has been acknowledged and with the hope Applied Theatre can have on groups of elderly people, this paper addresses the demand for action and explores whether recreational drama sessions can support older adults in a social, active, mental and holistic way.

Audience participation is another key component of *Fallen Angels* practice for older adults. As in any form of Applied Theatre, participatory drama aims to engage the audience in active involvement and offer them opportunities to gain some ownership of the work. Martin Nolter suggests that when facilitating participatory drama with the elderly, "[t]he objective should be maximum participation from all those involved to create a cohesive group which will find physical and mental stimulation and pleasure in studying and creating drama together" (154). Nolter's participatory drama work with the elderly suggests that the individuals are active participants and not audience members. This suggests that in these participatory drama classes participants are highly involved and merely supported and prompted by the facilitator, differing from audience participation in theatre where the actors/facilitators still hold a certain degree of control over the piece. Nolter advises that a drama program with participant involvement can work with any number of elderly people and can be established in various

elderly settings such as care homes or retirement villages. This notion of versatility is important as the participation that we are looking at is with older adults in a non-theatrical setting. The setting is rearranged to serve the purpose of the sessions aiming at enjoyment, as well as having positive effects on their daily lives, including cognitive, physical and wellbeing benefits that can be achieved by participation. Although there is no accurate prediction, and therefore no absolute claim, of the role of the setting in the dramatic process, we find the facilitation of drama/theatre in care homes exciting. Taking drama to places where older adults live is, in our view, not only a fascinating initiative taken by the actors, but also a respectful approach to the participants' needs, and a sincere effort to make them feel valid and special.

METHODOLOGY

This paper closely examines *Fallen Angels* as an example of practice that potentially supports the wellbeing of older adults. Data was collected by semi-structured interviews to allow interviewees freedom of speech and the opportunity to express themselves 'so that some issues can be explored more freely' (Greetham 214) and "non-participant but semi-immersive observation" (Wisker 137). This means that the researcher is not involved in the process as participant but familiarizes themselves with the group so that they are comfortable and behave as they normally would. Observations were also based on the characteristics and nature of the group, and helped in supporting the interviews and in contextualizing the work of the recreational group.

The first author visited the venue as part of the study, and interacted with a group of elderly people. For this reason, primary research, ethics and safeguarding were considered under the supervision of the second author. James Thompson expresses a view that the "digging" that is involved in obtaining information from others is "problematic" and must be approached with caution and he states that an inquisitive process of this kind can leave people feeling vulnerable and personally invaded (Thompson 39). The main concerns of ethics in an academic research project are that no harm comes to anybody in the process and that at all times extra care is taken about "confidentiality, the preservation of the rights of those involved in the research, and also issues to do with access to information" (Wisker 43). The study has gained a research ethics approval from our own Higher Education institution, consents were collected from the participants prior to the study, and false names of their choosing are used in the paper throughout to maintain complete confidentiality.

On the day of the visit, nine members attended the group. Two members were busy at the time of the interviews, therefore, data was collected from seven participants and their professional drama facilitator. The ages of the research participants ranged from fifty-five to eighty-two and the facilitator was in her thirties. Due to absence, the group were all female on the day of the visit. Characteristics of the group were varied. Some members were very extroverted from the start whereas others were quieter and more reserved. The amount of time that the interviewees had been attending the recreational drama group was wide-ranging. The newest member joined nine months previous to my visit and the oldest member had been attending the group since it began twenty years ago.

Data has been analyzed in a discussion focusing particularly on a set of specific variables. We consider participants previous experience within the arts and question whether this affects a member's willingness and desire to participate in a recreational drama class as they get older. If this is the case, would older adults who have little or no experience in drama be less inclined to join the group? We will be discussing the level of commitment within the group, taking into consideration attendance and the individual members involvement within the sessions. We aim to find out whether the participant's commitment to the sessions and to one another influence the success of the group that has been running for twenty years. We will enquire as to whether attending the recreational drama group presents its members with an opportunity to forge friendships vs. loneliness, and whether this has been achieved amongst the members that were included in my study. We will be discussing whether the members made friends within the class and whether this stimulates a more regular attendance. Does attending the recreational drama group affect the participant's mood and wellbeing? If so, how long does this last? We are also keen on considering how the participants feel before they arrive in comparison to how they feel once the class has ended. Are there social benefits of participating in a recreational drama group? If so, do the members value these encounters?

DISCUSSION

We asked whether the participants had been interested in the arts before they joined the group to gain an understanding of the effect of *Fallen Angels* on their familiarization with dramatic processes and their appreciation of the art form. Every member answered "yes" and specified what they had previously pursued. Most members elaborated on an interest as a child, one member was a teacher and helped with school productions, and another had

actually worked with a Theatre in Education group for a year or so. Elvira (Interview no. 3, 21 January 2016) believes that:

It's people who've had a [erm . . .] a love of drama in the past and want to continue now in their older years. Whereas people who've never done it and they're older, it's probably more difficult for them to get up and improvise. (Interview no. 3, 21 January 2016)

Nolter expressed that if an older adult had experiences with drama in earlier stages of their lives, there was often a longing to continue (153). Star (Interview no. 2, 21 January 2016) mentioned in her interview that she browses the Internet in search of more recreational drama groups for older adults. All of the members expressed a love of drama from a younger age and found the class through a specific search for a group of this kind. It may be that due to the group's sparse amount of promotion and advertising, potential members that are not specifically searching for this group are missing out on the opportunity to join. Older adults without previous experience in drama could be searching for a new hobby but are struggling to find the recreational drama group. In this sense, the facilitator believes that

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We're automatically cutting off a group of people that potentially could be, I'm not saying that they would be, but they could be interested. (Interview no. 8, 21 January 2016)

Most of the participants have been attending for over ten years with the longest attendee being Star (Interview no. 2, 21 January 2016) who started twenty years ago. Interviews were taken from two newer members who had started just over a year ago and the newest member Pertulia (Interview no. 7, 21 January 2016) joined only nine months before the visit. Some of the participants were coming to the group on a weekly basis.

The collective years that the participants have dedicated to the class highlights a sense of loyalty within the group. When asked what the biggest success story of this recreational drama group is, the facilitator commended the participants stating that

There's a real commitment to it. There's a real commitment to the group, there's a real commitment to learning. (Interview no. 8, 21 January 2016)

Jasmine (Interview no. 5, 21 January 2016) noted in her interview that she reluctantly had to take a term out when she broke her hip but returned immediately once she had made a full recovery. Star (Interview

no. 2, 21 January 2016) expressed a reluctance to attend the class when she was feeling low but insisted that she fought this urge and felt pleased once she was there. Out of all of the participants that attended the session, everyone arrived on time for the session and many of the members were substantially early. When the session ended, the participants were sitting around, conversing rather than leaving promptly. The amount of time that the participants have dedicated to the group and their continuous attendance regardless of mental and physical circumstances solidifies a loyalty to the group and to one another. Levels of commitment to the sessions and the art form itself can be influenced by many factors including experience, likeability of tasks and relationships within the group. Something as minuscule as a decision or a comment made by another member within the group could affect the participant's involvement and enthusiasm during activities because "emotions are complex, ephemeral, highly individual and difficult to research" (Dunn, Bundy and Stinson 2). With this statement in mind, it appears that the relationships built and the enjoyment of the sessions is a primary reason for the consistent attendance and ongoing loyalty within the group.

Even though it is clear that the participants have formed working relationships which make the sessions comfortable and enjoyable, we wanted to know if attending the group gives the members an opportunity to forge and nurture friendships. This could lessen the chances of the members falling into what Jeremy Hunt described as increasing numbers of lonely older adults in the UK (BBC). The interviewees were asked if they had made friends in the class since joining. Every participant answered "yes" and most of them added that they met up with other members outside of class. Pertulia, for example, (Interview no. 7, 21 January 2016) is the only member who does not meet up with others outside of class. However, she is also the newest member and it may be that she is still gelling with the rest of the group. Later on in the interview, Pertulia expressed that she had enough social encounters in the week due to being a part of many historical committees with her husband. Therefore, it may be that forging friendships and social networks that extend further than the class is not a need or priority to Pertulia. Other members expanded on their meetings outside of class which included coffee dates, trips to theatre, meals and visiting each other's homes. Jasmine (Interview no. 5, 21 January 2016) noted that she requested the help of another member and her husband to fix her broken computer in the past. In some respect, Jasmine relied on the help of these forged friendships from the group to help and support her with something that was becoming a nuisance in her life. This is a sign of forming relationships within the group that last outside the group meetings.

Observations show that many of the participants were speaking to one another in a friendly and familiar way. For example, when referring to one another, participants would often use nicknames and abbreviations. The members were asked to split into groups, everyone seemed happy to work with one another and there were no clear cliques or closed friendship groups. Golden et al. measures both loneliness and social networks in participants of sixty-five years and over (694). The participants studied were lonely and lacking social networks similar to the increasing amount of older people that Jeremy Hunt has concerns about in the UK (BBC). During the study, participants were interviewed in their own homes to assess their social support networks and a level of loneliness. The study concluded that both loneliness and a lack of social network had a significant impact on the wellbeing of these older adults. The research expresses that these feelings that had been found in the individuals that were studied are a great cause of depression in older adults. Golden et al. argues that “both loneliness and non-integrated social networks were associated with depression, hopelessness and wellbeing” (699). It is noteworthy that many participants in the *Fallen Angels* class have formed friendships that extend past the group itself. However, during the two hour sessions there is an air of friendliness and inclusivity throughout the group. Various events that members organize could be fulfilling a want or need for socialization and interaction with others.

We enquired as to how the participants feel once the class had ended on a Thursday afternoon to examine whether attending the class had a significant influence on the individual’s mood. Tinkerbell stated that

[The class] fulfilled something that’s still inside me. I love drama and [erm . . .] it just makes me feel so happy that I’ve been able to do it. (Interview no. 1, 21 January 2016)

Elvira (Interview no. 3, 21 January 2016) expressed that she was the treasurer of the group, as well as a member which could sometimes leave her feeling less happy. Jasmine (Interview no. 5, 21 January 2016) feels that she is never entirely satisfied with her performance but other than that she is happy and is certain that she would never miss a session if she could help it. An Age UK (2016) factsheet which is updated monthly and provides most up-to-date percentages that are publicly available measures every aspect of older adults’ lives. 82% of the older adults studied said that in the two weeks previous to the questionnaire they had felt happy or content either every day or most days. However, this would suggest that 18% of those questioned did not feel happy or content on most of the days. This

is considered to be quite a high percentage of older adults that may feel unhappy often. During observations of the work by *Fallen Angels* the class members were smiling and laughing continuously. It is quite clear through the interviews and observations that the majority of the participants leave the class feeling better than they did before, which is an indication of improved mood.

To gain a better understanding of the significance of the recreational drama group within the participant's weekly schedules, we asked if the participants attended any other social or recreational activities apart from the drama group. There was a surprising variation and quantity of activities that the participants attend in the week. Tinkerbell (Interview no. 1, 21 January 2016) was the only participant who did not attend any other groups or activities. Anne (Interview no. 6, 21 January 2016) hadn't been attending anything else but was aware that a new improvisation group for older adults was starting up and would be going along to that. The rest of the participants mentioned several classes including an age concerned choir, Pilates and arts and crafts. Tinkerbell (Interview no. 1, 21 January 2016) also showed an interest in the new improvisation class; however, she was concerned that it was a late evening class and stated that she would not feel comfortable driving at night-time. Her concerns about evening classes suggest that recreational groups for older adults may be better placed in the daytime. Furthermore, the Thursday class is suitably held in the afternoon which may make it more accessible and appealing for attendees. An evening class may not be as successful, as naturally the participants may be tired and apprehensive about leaving their home when it is dark. From observations it appears that the class was full of energy and every participant contributed ideas and got involved.

Halfway through the recreational drama class, the participants all congregated in a communal area where they were served hot beverages and biscuits. It was observed that as well as conversations concerning the class itself, the participants were also having personal discussions about their week and other unrelated topics. These fifteen minutes felt very much like any social gathering that may take place at a coffee shop or a restaurant between friends. "Loneliness can be understood as an individual's personal, subjective sense of lacking desired affection, closeness and social interaction with others" (Age UK, 2014). Crimmens writes that there are two types of interaction, "contact" and "connection" (passim). Contact is a wholehearted interaction which involves opening ourselves up to somebody else on a personal and emotional level. Connection encounters are more distanced and can be an inclusive interaction amongst several people. Connections can still be friendly but are neces-

sarily less personal. Crimmens worries that as we get older our contact encounters become limited (*passim*). She stresses that we need this personal and emotional socialization to feel validated and to give our lives purpose. During the coffee break, the members were not just conversing but were truly dedicating time to listening and to acknowledging one another (what Crimmens describes as “contact” encounters when the members were taking time to acknowledge one another in an intimate and personal way). When asked what can be gained from participation in the arts, the facilitator of the group stated that

It brings people together and it makes them feel part of something for the time that they’re here and beyond. It helps them to forge friendships. (Interview no. 8, 21 January 2016).

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It has been suggested that friendship can have a significant impact on our health by reducing stress, improving self-esteem, coping mechanisms and generally boosting our happiness (Mayo Clinic). During the interviews, we also asked the participants whether they felt that they had enough social encounters during an average week, which could be anything from a phone conversation with a relative to a coffee date with friends. Annabelle (Interview no. 4, 21 January 2016) expressed that she would like more social encounters but physically felt that she did as much as she could. Star (Interview no. 2, 21 January 2016) does not necessarily desire additional social encounters but does feel that she should do more and try to be more sociable. Tinkerbelle (Interview no. 1, 21 January 2016) feels that she has enough social encounters but expressed that she was able to do a lot more when she was younger. Furthermore, she has had to drop classes that she was attending due to back problems that she has acquired with age. Anne’s (Interview no. 6, 21 January 2016) social encounters differ from one week to the next. Anne (Interview no. 6, 21 January 2016) also expressed concerns that because many of her friends were not retired like herself, she did not get to see them as often as she would like to and this resulted in her constantly looking for things to keep her busy. She noted that if she did not keep herself busy, her mood would significantly decrease. The facilitator noted that socialization was something that could be gained by attending a recreational drama group:

Socialization which is the obvious one, you know, people come here each week and they meet their friends and so that’s a really important thing. They’ve got a group of people that they’ve got something in common

with. They're also the same sort of people, they're fun, they're lively, they're vibrant. (Interview no. 8, 21 January 2016)

During the session itself, communication and socialization was a key component of all of the tasks that were set. To begin the class, participants played a word association game where they were required to match a descriptive word to their peers' first name. This game allowed the members to acknowledge one another on a personal level. The facilitator asked members to devise a scene in groups of three. This allowed the participants to discuss and consider the scene within their groups. The participants worked together to communicate and play around with different ideas. Throughout the whole time that this task was underway, the room was filled with laughter and discussion. Even though Elvira (Interview no. 3, 21 January 2016), Pertulia (Interview no. 7, 21 January 2016) and Tinkerbelle (Interview no. 1, 21 January 2016) all felt that they had enough social encounters in a week, data suggests that this recreational drama group provides its members with a certain degree of socialization. For those members who were unsure about whether they were content with their weekly amount of social encounters, it may be that access to more recreational drama groups could benefit their wellbeing.

Even though some participants expressed feeling de-motivated to come to the class at times, they assured me that once they were there they were glad that they had attended. Learning and developing skills during a participatory arts programme for older adults can give meaning and purpose to their lives (The Baring Foundation). If the participants did not have the recreational drama group to motivate them, they may not have any other means of energizing themselves in the same way.

Sometimes you can come and you can feel a bit low or something's happened, hasn't it? But I think when you're acting or doing anything really that you have to concentrate on, it puts everything else behind, doesn't it? (Anne, Interview no. 6, 21 January 2016)

From what some of the participants have said, it is almost as if the recreational drama class is a means of emotional outlet for them. Therefore, there is reason to believe that attending the recreational drama group supports the participant's wellbeing by motivating them and providing them with a creative outlet. If we were to develop this study further, it would be interesting to find out how long this significant improvement in mood lasted on the participants. The long-term impact of recreational dramatic activities on older adults' wellbeing needs to be further investigated.

The large array of activities that the members pursue alongside the recreational drama class resulted in most of the participants feeling content with their weekly amount of social engagement. With hindsight, it is suggested that none of the members are particularly lonely or isolated within their lives. However, it is apparent that attending the group gives the participants an opportunity to enjoy a substantial amount of social interaction. As noted before, participants take time to listen and talk to one another on a personal level throughout the session and during the coffee break. Even though the group in question did not seem to class themselves as lonely or seriously lacking socialization, the social benefits of the recreational drama group are evident in my data. With these findings in mind, attendance to a recreational drama class could potentially decrease the concerning numbers of chronically lonely older adults in the UK (BBC).

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On the day of the visit, Stanislavski's given circumstances (*passim*) were the primary focus of the session. The facilitator explained some brief objectives of the session to the class. The group started with a discussion on what they considered to be naturalistic acting. The facilitator then gave smaller groups a scenario and asked them to improvise a very natural and realistic scene. They were then asked to use the same scene but to act in an over the top and unrealistic way. It was observed that after each task, the group shared their ideas and findings. The group's approach to drama seemed very academic. Considering the characteristics of the group, the facilitator expressed that:

They've still got questions, they've still got a desire to learn, they've still got a desire to get up and do it. (Interview no. 8, 21 January 2016)

Later on in the interview she suggested that this kind of work does involve mental attributes such as remembering things and concentrating, which can help to keep an aging mind active. The facilitator (Interview no. 8, 21 January 2016) also noted that some of the participants primarily attended the class because they wanted to learn and develop their understanding of drama practices. As well as being mentally stimulating, it was observed that learning and experiencing something new together may encourage closer bonds and friendships in the class. As individuals started to understand the activities more, they were helping others and an academic negotiation was taking place. There were clear set outcomes of the session which almost feels as if the participants are on a personal and educational journey together. Helping one another and learning something new together seemed to be a productive way of forging and solidifying friendships that existed within the class.

When asked if they would attend more than one recreational drama session a week, Annabelle (Interview no. 4, 21 January 2016), Jasmine (Interview no. 5, 21 January 2016), Tinkerbell (Interview no. 1, 21 January 2016) and Star (Interview no. 2, 21 January 2016) all answered “yes.” Pertulia (Interview no. 7, 21 January 2016), Elvira (Interview no. 3, 21 January 2016) and Anne (Interview no. 6, 21 January 2016) said that they might attend more than one a week. It is noteworthy that none of the participants interviewed said that they would not attend more than one session a week. When questioned if there are enough recreational drama groups available to older adults, some participants and the facilitator (Interview no. 8, 21 January 2016) expressed concerns that the idea of drama might scare potential members away. The facilitator tackled misconceptions stating that:

When it comes to drama I think people’s perception of what it is that it’s scary, it’s frightening, I’m going to be on stage. (Interview no. 8, 21 January 2016)

Annabelle (Interview no. 4, 21 January 2016) voiced that getting new members to join was difficult as people felt that they might be exposed or frightened by the art form. However, once they join she feels that they quickly begin to feel comfortable and start to enjoy the sessions. Elvira feels that drama groups are more likely to attract younger people and states:

Well I don’t know whether it’s a bit of a niche thing for older people whether because, you know, we have quite a job to get people to come to us and we’ve had people who have come to try out the class and it’s not really their thing. (Interview no. 3, 21 January 2016)

Star felt that lots of recreational drama opportunities were available for younger people but not enough for older adults.

I look at every site that mentions children and they go up to 18 and I think what about us old people? (Interview no. 2, 21 January 2016)

Star is not alone with her concerns, as The Baring Foundation also deliberates why recreational drama work with older adults struggles for financial support when so much more funding is available for drama with younger people. Their report considers the unsettling idea that the little support available for arts with older adults may be due to organizations harbouring against and negative misconceptions. The *Fallen An-*

gels sessions are primarily devoted to “bursting the myths of ageism” (Telander, Quinlan and Verson 5) due to the scrutiny that they have come under for practicing drama with members past a certain age. Even though some of the participants observed had mobility issues with one member using a walking stick, this did not affect the class as chairs were available at all times and members had regular breaks from being on their feet. Out of all of the participants that were interviewed, every member felt that there were not enough recreational drama groups available for older adults. If age is indeed a factor as to why there is not more drama classes available for this specific age group, this research would suggest that age is irrelevant as drama is well within older adult’s physical and mental capabilities.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In the limited spine of this study, we bring anecdotal evidence to argue that recreational drama sessions that take place in community venues can be enjoyable for older adults, may hold benefits for old people including, enjoyment, and improvement of mood through social interaction, growth of relationships and a sense of belonging to a community. The study shows that older adults may develop an ongoing loyalty and dedication to drama sessions. Not only have some of the members been partaking in the group for up to 20 years but participants continue to attend regardless of physical and mental hindrances. It is promising, in our view, to see drama becoming part of the weekly routine of older people, and it encourages us to believe that dedication to drama sessions shows more than loyalty to drama. It indicates a growing sense of belonging in a safe, non-judgmental, respectful social environment where enjoyable and creative activities happen and people feel strongly as members of a community. This is an important finding because it makes a proposition. It proposes drama as a possible way of combating loneliness in mature life and enhancing healthy socializing and potentially an improved wellbeing especially for those who are alone in life. The study also suggests that the friendships transcend the class as most of the participants meet up in between sessions. This would suggest that the class not only forged friendships but also supported and benefitted most of the participants on a social level. The participants are not only meeting up and socializing for two hours a week but are also visiting each other’s houses and arranging leisurely outings together regularly. Every participant that was studied had previous experiences within the field of drama which suggests that the individuals may hold a desire to continue something that they have always enjoyed. A desire to fulfill a life’s dream and participate

in drama actively appears to motivate them to become creative, find companionship and inspiration through interaction with others in drama. In conclusion, joining the recreational drama group has supported the members in breaking their isolation, meeting new people of the same age group, sharing, making friends and has built the foundations for what seems to be an ongoing social circle.

The study has highlighted some potential benefits of recreational drama work with older adults and contributed some ideas to a lacking field of research. Given the small sample, further investigation with larger groups of participants across the country is required to collect wider evidence about the role of recreational drama in the wellbeing of older adults. There are still questions to be answered such as how long the improvement of mood lasts after a drama session, what impact drama might have on those who have no previous experience of drama, and whether attendance to the group substantially improves the member's physical health and emotional wellbeing. However, this branches out into other fields of healthcare and wellbeing, and would need further cross-disciplinary research and resources to pursue. Equally, further investigation of the impact of dramatic activities with a group of mature adults could give the groups a wider scope, more evidence on the positive impact of drama on older people, so as to allow the recreational drama groups to grow further both nationally and internationally. Drama is for life!

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Theatre as Contagion: Making Sense of Communication in Performative Arts¹

ABSTRACT

Contagion is more than an epidemiological fact. The medical usage of the term is no more and no less metaphorical than in the entire history of explanations of how beliefs circulate in social interactions. The circulation of such communicable diseases and the circulation of ideas are both material and experiential. Diseases and ideas expose the power and danger of bodies in contact, as well as the fragility and tenacity of social bonds. In the case of the theatre, various tropes of contagion are to be found in both the fictional world on the stage (at least since Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*) and in many theories defining the rules of interaction between theatre audiences, fictitious characters and/or performers. In consequence, the historically changing concept of contagion has in many respects influenced how mimesis was conceived and understood. The main goal of my article is to demonstrate how the concept of contagion has changed over the last few decades and how it may influence our understanding of the idea of mimesis and participation in performative arts. This will be achieved in two steps. Firstly, I will compare the concept of contagion as the outbreak narrative that had influenced, among others, Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and the Plague* with the more recent and dynamic concept of epidemic structured around the tipping point. Secondly, I will look for performative art forms with similar structure of audience responses, analyzing Mariano Pensotti's project *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* (2010), in order to demonstrate new forms of performativity and (re)presentation.

Keywords: contagion as communicable disease, epidemic as metaphor, the tipping point, mimesis, participation in performative arts.

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The epidemic of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in the mid-1980s brought the idea of emerging infections to public attention once again. This, in turn, has dramatically undermined the prevailing narrative about the triumphant progress of epidemiology, which was born at the turn of the 20th century. As a consequence, the conviction that mankind has eventually triumphed over nature was put into question. In the first decades of the 21st century, accounts of newly surfacing diseases with alarming mortality rates began to appear with increasing frequency in scientific publications and the mainstream media worldwide: Avian Influenza, atypical pneumonia known as SARS, mad cow disease (BSE), Ebola, Marburg, and—most recently—the Zika virus, which in a few months may spread throughout Europe although, as of today, no vaccine or preventive drug is yet available. Significantly, at the same time and due to the ever increasing mobility of our global society, methods of fighting contagion have changed, as has the conception of communicative diseases and the ways they spread. This has far-reaching consequences beyond the field of medicine, as contagion is not only an epidemiological fact.

The word “contagious,” as Priscilla Ward has recently reminded us, means literally “adjacent, placed side by side” (12–13), and the medical usage of the term is no more and no less metaphorical than in the entire history of explanations of how beliefs circulate in social interactions. The circulation of such communicable diseases and the circulation of ideas are both material and experiential. Diseases and ideas expose the power and danger of bodies in contact, as well as the fragility and tenacity of social bonds. For this reason, as early as 1976, William McNeal insisted that infectious diseases have shaped populations and civilizations since the dawn of humanity and therefore “ought to be part of our understanding of history” (5). In the case of the theatre, playhouses were closed on health grounds, for example during the bubonic plague in the 16th and 17th centuries. It is worth recalling that the reason for closing them was not only that a playhouse was a place where a large crowd gathered but also the belief that the theatre, unlike religious and secular places of congregation, was morally dubious. Obviously, that is not the only link between infectious diseases and theatre. Various tropes of contagion are to be found in both the fictional world on the stage (at least since Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*) and in many theories, mostly from the first half of the 20th century, which tried to define the rules of interaction between theatre audiences, fictitious characters and/or performers. It is in the last case that contagion has subverted the traditional concept of mimesis as a defining link between an artefact and reality (be it on the level of their structures or external appearances). Now the emphasis of the concept of theatre communication as contagion

has visibly shifted once again: the intended impact on the audience mattered, and it might but did not need to be determined by the mimetic character of the performance. The main goal of my article, therefore, is to demonstrate how the concept of contagion has changed over the last few decades, and how it allows us to go beyond the idea of mimesis as the still privileged basis of communication in many theories of performative arts.

This effort may seem rather vain when one takes into account the articles gathered in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, a volume formative for the field. In this collection, Susan Leigh Foster in the article “Movement’s Contagion: The Kinesthetic Impact of Performance” presents a survey of the 20th-century theoretical approaches to the question of the sensory experience provided by corporeal elements on the stage. The text opens with a reference to the *New York Times* critic John Martin who in the 1930s described as contagious the effect of movement on viewers of modern dance. Unlike ballet, with its well-defined rules of choreography and the story explained in the verbal form of a libretto, modern dance was intrinsically connected to the emotions, as dance movements themselves became the vehicles for developing narrative. Essentially, the individuated experience of the dancer’s musculature, with its unconscious psychic impulses, could never be verbalized. The only way to communicate them was to make the viewers feel equivalent kinesthetic sensations, to experience “inner mimicry” (qtd. in Foster 49). What changed here is Aristotle’s understanding of theatrical mimesis as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself . . . an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery” (9–10). The imitation of action was superseded not so much by an imitation of a human body in action as by a concrete physical body on the stage in motion that emanates psychic energies and/or emotions. Therefore, when Martin used the word “contagious,” he meant precisely the rapid spread of influence or emotion from one body to another, from the body on the stage to bodies in the auditorium. The title of Foster’s article may suggest that the kinesthetic impact of performance always equals a certain type of movement’s contagion. However, she concludes that it does not need to be construed as an act of contamination to which the viewers succumb because their experience is, at least partly, contingent on the historically changing conception of the body. To prove her point, she has constructed a chronological trajectory that ends with the discovery in the 1990s of a new class of brain cells, called “mirror neurons.” They are responsible for an internal motor representation of the observed event that may have different functions, imitation being only one of them. Even if Foster stresses that imitation is one function among many others, the trajectory she has

constructed goes full circle: the link between the body on the stage and its internal motor representation in our brain is obviously analogous to the link between reality and a work of art in the traditional concept of mimesis. On the basis of the presupposed existence of mirror neurons, dancer and dance scholar Ivar Hagendoorn defined in 2004 the dancer's body as a malleable indicator of multiple scenarios that could be developed by viewers which, as a consequence, made the idea of contagion in dance theatre entirely obsolete. This is, at least, what Foster implies.

I can only agree that we need to think about the human body, taking into account the historicity of its conception. However, Foster's conclusion implies that the concept of contagion has not changed and remains universal. My goal is the opposite. As a point of departure, I will take quite an obvious example of the theatre as contagion, namely the poetic vision of Antonin Artaud. In many respects, Artaud's use of the bubonic plague as the metaphor of theatre's impact on its audience is similar to Martin's understanding of modern dance performances as a communicative disease, as summarized by Foster. However, while Martin had actual performances in mind, Artaud dreamed about possible stage means with an envisioned "magical" or "mythical" force that was put into practice only by the experimental theatres in the second half of the 20th century that used ritual rhythms (*The Living Theatre*, *The Performance Group*) or intentional violence acts (*La Fura dels Baus*) to enforce the contagious action of performance. Nevertheless, when writing about theatre, both tried to see through the structure of Western culture and civilization, and both thought that the direct communication by means of emotion and psychic impulses were much better suited to achieving the goal than articulated language and causal logic. For this reason both preferred the language of contagion when speaking about theatre communication.

Artaud never ceased to emphasize that "the theater, like the plague, is a delirium and is communicative" (27) and, therefore, he kept on explaining how "to locate the action of the theater like that of the plague on the level of a veritable epidemic" (25). He lived in an age when epidemiology blossomed in France, deeply changed on many levels by Louis Pasteur (see Latour). France was a country that witnessed unprecedented interaction between discourses of medicine and theatre, where tropes of contagion, inoculation and immunity received new currency. They were used by Dadaists, as well as surrealists who described their activities in bacteriological terms, and Artaud was active as a member of both Parisian groups. What is more, as Nicola Savarese and then Stanton B. Garner have argued, the Dutch East Indian Pavilion, where Artaud saw the Balinese dancers perform during the 1931 Colonial Exposition, included a display on the fight

against plague and other diseases. This neighbourhood was indeed one of the sources of Artaud's new theatre, one that has no connection with the logocentric basis of Western civilization and therefore is able to act like a plague, to kill or to purify.

In his essay "The Theater and the Plague," to which I have already referred, Artaud gives an archetypal vision of the catastrophic invasion of the mythicized Black Death. He means particularly the bubonic plague that broke out in 1720 in his native Marseilles. For this reason he feels personally connected with the plague which an excerpt from his letter to Abel Gance conclusively proves. As early as 1927 Artaud wrote about himself: "I have the plague in the marrow of my nerves and I suffer from it" (qtd. in Garner 11). These and many more references to the modern etiology of contagion make his theory of the theatre as contagion similar to what Priscilla Wald in her seminal book *Contagious Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* defined as the outbreak narrative, born at the onset of the new disciplines of bacteriology and sociology, and paradigmatic for the first half of the 20th century and a few decades afterwards. Wald writes:

The outbreak narrative—in its scientific, journalistic, and fictional incarnations—follows a formulaic plot that begins with the identification of an emerging infection, includes discussion of the global networks throughout which it travels, and chronicles the epidemiological work that ends with its containment. (2)

All of these crucial elements can be found in Artaud's writings. I will mention only two of them that seem to be important as a backdrop for a new and updated definition of contagion.

The first element is the actor, a typical healthy carrier who literally embodies communicable disease. His function is to produce an experience of connectedness that interferes with biological, social, and metaphysical links. The second one is the fact that the outbreak narrative located the danger of infection directly in what Priscilla Wald calls "spatial promiscuity," which in Artaud's theatre of contagion boiled down to the intended elimination of the separation between the stage and the audience, prototypical for the theatre itself. Undoubtedly, Artaud was critical of an epidemiological definition of contagion, which he deemed all too rational. He was, however, convinced that the physical closeness between performers and members of the audience, enforcing an experience of direct communication, should play an important part in his Theatre of Cruelty. In the eponymous essay Artaud wrote straightforwardly:

It is in order to attack the spectator's sensibility on all sides that we advocate a revolving spectacle which, instead of making the stage and auditorium two closed worlds, without possible communication, spreads its visual and sonorous outbursts over the entire mass of the spectators. (86)

For me the phrase "the entire mass of the spectators" is of utmost importance. Indisputably, Artaud describes not only a one-sided communication, with no sign of any feedback loops, but also conceives of the theatre audience in the same manner as his compatriot and sociologist Gustave Le Bon, who defined the psychology of the crowd at the turn of the 19th century. Here and there the same mechanism is to be found: an individual caught in the spirit and actions of a group surrenders personal agency and even rational thought for the sake of receiving the message from the stage straight under his/her skin. In other words, the mimetic relation between the performance and the external reality became less important than the direct communication between the stage and the audience turned into a crowd in order to become a more sensitive receiver of what the theatre wanted to communicate. And this is precisely what changed in a set of new metaphors of contagion introduced at the threshold of this century, when the internal dynamic of the crowd became the very centre of attention as evidenced by the theory of the Tipping Point.

In his book *The Tipping Point. How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, *The New Yorker* writer Malcolm Gladwell looks at major changes in our society that so often happen suddenly and unexpectedly. He asks why crime in New York dropped so dramatically in the mid-1990s, how the apparently moribund brand of Hush Puppies shoes became fashionable in a few months' time and then was available in every mall in America, and how an unknown writer ended up as a best-selling author. Although it may seem that these phenomena have nothing in common, in his opinion they share a basic, underlying pattern. Gladwell concludes: "Ideas and products and messages and behaviours spread just like viruses" (7). Even if he argues that it makes sense to use a model of outbreak of infectious disease, Gladwell does not focus so much on the very idea of contagion. Rather, he prefers to analyze these phenomena as social epidemics, that is, he looks especially at the dramatic moment when they reach their critical mass, which he calls "the Tipping Point." Thus he is clearly not interested in the outbreak narrative and the problem of finding the responsible carrier of a given disease: "Patient Zero," as defined by Wald. Instead, he pays close attention to the dynamics of epidemics, the extreme disproportion between the cause and the end result which visibly indicates that we are losing control of the course of events. Importantly, an epidemic may tip in

more than one way. As Gladwell argues: “The world of the Tipping Point is a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is—contrary to all our expectations—a certainty” (13–14). Gladwell’s remark helps us to understand why the outbreak narrative, structured as a whodunit, cannot describe the contemporary world where pragmatic laws of causality no longer apply. This global world needs another model of contagion which could be useful in analyzing both emerging infections and new ways of social communication, including the ones emerging in performative arts.

To find out in what respect the new model of contagion should differ from the old outbreak narrative, I will take a cursory look at two Hollywood movies. They tackle the same topic, but on the structural level do it in quite different and telling ways. The first one, Wolfgang Petersen’s *Outbreak*, loosely based on Richard Preston’s non-fictional book *The Hot Zone*, premièred in March 1995. Significantly, when the film was released, a real outbreak of Ebola occurred in Zaire, where the “what if” story began to be told and strongly influenced both the plausibility of the fictional plot and the impact of the movie as a wake-up call for our contemporaries. The second movie, Steven Soderbergh’s *Contagion*, was released a decade and a half later, in 2011. It was inspired by the 2003 SARS epidemic and a 2009 flu pandemic. To ensure an accurate depiction of a pandemic event, the screenwriters consulted WHO representatives and noted medical experts. Despite, or because of, that, *Contagion* met with mixed reviews by both film critics and general audiences. The reason was the untypical way the film presented the popular subject, introducing new types of narrative about epidemic. These multifarious and multi-level relations with real-life diseases and epidemics make both films ideal case studies when one tries to identify the main changes of the dominant concept of contagion.

Outbreak follows closely the rules of the conventional and formulaic outbreak narrative defined by Wald. The action starts in a desolate African camp decimated by an unknown haemorrhagic virus back in 1967. The localized site of infection was bombed shortly after that by American forces. However, the virus re-emerges almost two decades later in the USA, transmitted by a monkey illegally imported to a Californian pet-shop. The monkey is quite early identified as a carrier of the disease, and the provincial town of Cedar Creedis is soon quarantined to prevent further spreading out of the epidemic. The rest of the story centres around the search for the runaway monkey and a dramatic conflict among the responsible military personnel about how to deal with the infected city in order to contain and destroy the virus. The author of *Contagious Cultures* recognized the paradigmatic character of the story told in Petersen’s *Outbreak*

and used its detailed analysis to illustrate her arguments. For this reason the film is the best choice to be compared with Soderbergh's *Contagion*. Soderbergh's film tells almost the same story, but in a significantly different way, using the multi-narrative hyper-link cinematic style typical of other movies by this director.

Contagion begins with a series of loosely structured images from around the world that demonstrate how the emerging infection maps the changing spaces (in each case not only the name of the city but also its population is mentioned as an important factor), relationships, practices and temporalities of a globalizing world. Importantly, the plot develops chronologically, almost day by day, starting with the second day of the emerging disease. Only in the last scene of the film, after the death toll has reached 26 million people worldwide and the cure is finally found, can we see that the outbreak turned out to be of no importance. This applies to both the figure of the disease carrier, and the identified "Patient Zero." In a style typical of epidemiological detective stories, the emerging hidden plot is recounted as it would have been done by the virus, while surveillance cameras show who did what and where. This, however, is deliberately discredited as an important source of information and predictability for those who try to fight pandemic, as well as for the viewers. Soderbergh uses all of these well-known thematic and structural conventions of the outbreak narrative in order to demonstrate their uselessness in today's global village, where pandemics have acquired entirely new dynamics. In *Contagion*, communicable disease marks the increasing connections of the inhabitants of the globalizing world. The unpredictability of their networks nullifies the typical procedures of prevention, quarantine or contention of an epidemic within a well-defined borders. What counts are small changes that will "tip" in an unpredictable way. In this way, Soderbergh very accurately depicts what Gladwell describes as a world out of this world, where pure impossibility proves its own facticity.

Soderbergh's *Contagion* demonstrates an updated concept of communicable disease. It does not, however, use the conception as a means of analyzing social phenomena, especially new ways of communication in performative arts. Many scholars (Bourriaud, Bishop) have already written about theatre communication as participation. Even if the ways of engaging spectators have changed, the agency of the audience has increased, allowing each spectator to become an active co-creator. Undoubtedly, theatre has done with illusion and re-presentation, and places a great emphasis on presentation and everything that is real and factual, but it is still involved in arranging the premises and means for spectators to become engaged co-creators. In other words, theatre still upholds the traditional concept of

mimesis, although modified and redefined. Instead, performative art forms that are structured around the tipping point, as I posit, have another *raison d'être*. They no longer engage and influence the audience. They cannot be treated as artefacts and do not communicate any messages. They merely intend to be noticed. However, even if they remain invisible, they still remain performative in the sense of self-sustainability; they are not mimetic, but “becoming,” as Gilles Deleuze would have it.

Where to look for such performative art forms? First of all, as Annika Wehrle convincingly demonstrates, in places that the French anthropologist Marc Augé called “no-places,” with reference to such purely functional, transitive places as large train or bus stations, airports, shopping malls, hotels or even large lifts. In these places without properties, strangers gather by necessity, trying to reach their places of destination as soon as possible. Nevertheless, no-places are important knots in today’s global networks. They are not polyvalent, but have the capacity to shape momentarily and form dynamic and hybrid constellations, ever changing assemblages of humans and non-humans alike. Emergent, performative events in such no-places differ distinctively from both site-specific performances and Augusto Boal’s Invisible Theatre adopted in various countries. The latter is not only conceived of as a political intervention, but is also typically based on a pre-given scenario, implemented to test certain people’s reactions in chosen places. Site-specific performances are different in this respect. They install and stabilize a theatrical space in a non-theatrical one, feeding on its real-life plausibility and veracity. Contrary to that, forms of today’s contagion theatre are conceived as a conceptual intervention, and gradually adapt to the changing demands of a developing situation. This kind of intervention, as I have already emphasized, does not have to be immediately visible to all people around, each of them preoccupied with their own goals. Their inattentiveness, and unpreparedness for an aesthetic experience, provide the very basis for an epidemic to “tip,” which always comes as a surprise. This was best evidenced by the so-called “negative performativity” of Joanna Rajkowska’s or Cezary Bodzianowski’s projects (Jopek) in Poland and by Annika Wehrle’s previously mentioned book *Passagenräume* which gives other interesting examples of Western performances of the last decade, intentionally created on the crossroads between the everyday and performative practices.

Such was the departure point for Mariano Pensotti’s project *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You*, created in cooperation with Berlin Theater Hebel am Ufer. This performance, serving as a kind of showcase here because of its deliberately minimalistic aesthetic structure, can be situated at the border of what could be recognized as (negative) performative arts today. *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* premiered in 2010 in Berlin, and it took

place in the metro station Hallesches Tor. It was subsequently performed within the framework of the project “Parallel Cities” carried out in various theatres, among others Warsaw’s Teatr Nowy. Performances took place in train stations in Zurich, Buenos Aires and Warsaw. In the latter case, it was performed on two consecutive nights (2–3 June 2011) on one of the platforms at Warsaw’s main train station (Dworzec Centralny). As in other places where *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* was created before, there were no actors or performers involved but only four Polish writers with their laptops: Marcin Cecko, Sylwia Chutnik, Agnieszka Drotkiewicz and Jaś Kapela. Their main and only aim during the performance was to closely observe the people around: patiently waiting passengers, railwaymen and the homeless, as well as potential theatre viewers who came here to attend a performance announced in public and social media, and perhaps were still waiting for it to begin. Thus, four writers, located in different places on the platform, were observing what was going on for two hours, and registering live their impressions in tweets, posts or chats. Their texts were instantaneously projected on big screens to potentially be read by all; however, sometimes the texts were difficult to identify as such because of the large variety of other announcements. During the Berlin première, the director Mariano Pensotti explained the main idea of the project in the following way: “Like surveillance cameras recording anonymous individuals’ every moment in the station, each writer transforms the spontaneous progress through a public space into narratives conveying what is going on—or might be going on—inside people’s heads in parallel with the bustling life of the station” (qtd. in Wehrle 299). No member of the creative team could foresee whether the presence of well-known Polish writers, as well as their comments written live would be noticed, and how people around would react to them. The situation might have “tipped” in many ways. Perhaps somebody, feeling insulted by one of comments, would call the police. Perhaps a group of bored, beer-drinking youngsters would take the writers’ presence as an opportunity for entertainment, and they might try to enter into discussion with the performers. Perhaps, on the contrary, somebody who has recognized a celebrity would ask for an autograph, and others would join them, queuing up, which might attract the attention of the people around and turn the small gathering into a big event. One thing is certain: today’s situation will not repeat in the same form tomorrow. It will not reoccur because a performance of this type is a hardly visible intervention. Only the main idea and the location were specified, but the course of events and the message have not been predetermined. Thus, this intervention has to be located at the opposite end of the spectrum to what is usually defined as prototypical theatre art and theatre performance.

It is time to ask one important question: in what respect the renowned and extensively analyzed performances differ from the ones performed in Augé's "no-places," places of transition? In response, it suffices to compare the artistic intervention in everyday practices carried out in *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* with Marina Abramovic's performance *Lips of Thomas*, premièred in the mid-1970s. The latter served as a main example of the basic principles of new aesthetics in Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance*. As Fischer-Lichte emphasizes, each participant could choose the frame of reference for the event in which s/he was just taking part. Everyone was free to identify it as a fully-fledged artistic event or, on the contrary, as a social event. Each choice presupposes dramatically different kind of thinking and behaviour during the performance, first of all in such extreme situations as Abramovic initiated. A fully-fledged artistic event allows the audience to remain distant and disengaged, so as to retain the autonomy of the artefact. The participants of a social event should intervene before the artist, for example, bleeds herself to death. In her more recent book *Performativität* Fischer-Lichte proves that this might be Abramovic's intention, by providing information about another performance from the same time, *Rhythm 0* (89–92). Supposedly, the artist was so unsatisfied with the participants' behaviour during her previous performances that in 1974 she decided to invite a group of people who were just passing by the art gallery Studio Mora in Naples, and did not look like art connoisseurs at all. Only then could she hope that one of the participants would possibly act against the unspoken rules of conduct in art galleries, and in this way her scenario will be eventually completed. For Fischer-Lichte, both of Abramovic's performances conclusively prove how important the freedom of choice is for the foundations of the new aesthetics of performance. I have no doubt that such a choice was important back in the 1970s and could be recognized today as one of the basic elements of the aesthetics of that time. The question remains, however, whether this claim still holds for all kinds of performances nowadays.

I posit that for those who were at Warsaw's main station on one of those June nights in 2011, and for many participants of other performances of this kind, the choice between two contradictory frames of reference was still possible, but that it had irrevocably lost its previous relevance. After all, Pensotti's *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* was not as self-referential and meta-aesthetic as many of Abramovic's performances from the 1970s. Moreover, it did not require the active involvement of the participants at all. The performance itself engaged neither with art nor with reality. It merely provided a framework for everyday practices but not in the same way as Marcel Duchamp, who exhibited such everyday objects as a urinal

or a bicycle wheel in an art gallery. The framing in the case of Pensotti's performance did not turn a piece of reality into an art object or an artistic event. It was only an attempt at drawing people's attention just like a policeman does or a person wearing an ostentatious dress or make-up. Possibly many commuters had no clue that they were close to a performance or an unusual event. And those who did realized it could fall back upon an infinite number of scenarios to understand what was going on around them. But these scenarios did not differ a bit from the scripts that govern behaviour on a train platform. The title *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* expressed the core of the performance's concept: those taking an active part and those completely unaware of it were dealing with the same matter of potentiality, inventing their own alternative histories or worlds. In other words, the performance did not possess Yuri Lotman's dual structure typical for works of art. Therefore, if we wish to talk about mimesis in this case, we might do so only in such a way as René Girard did in *A Theatre of Envy* when writing about the mimetic character of desire, and other types of social communication whose dynamic is basically the same as those analyzed by Gladwell in *The Tipping Point*.

The example of *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* proves that what is needed today is a profound verification of the rudiments of traditional aesthetics, primarily the concept of mimesis, authorship and autonomy, and the specificity of aesthetic experience. Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that in this case we are dealing with a type of performativity which differs from the one analyzed by Fischer-Lichte who clearly distinguished artistic and cultural performances. The new performativity of the first decades of the 21st century emerges because of the fact that this operation is not possible any more, and such an impossibility creates the very source of these kinds of performances. It was not my aim to provide a proposal for such a new aesthetics here but only to flag its necessity. I wanted, at the same time, to demonstrate that a revisited and redefined concept of contagion could provide useful means to tackle an analysis of performative dynamics as an assemblage of humans and non-humans. I emphasized that those who deliberately or not became participants in *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* had a choice of infinite number of scenarios, in order to intentionally refer to Foster's article "Movement's Contagion." I referred especially to the fragment which alluded to Ivar Hagedoorn's description of the dancer's body as a malleable indicator of multiple scenarios that could be developed by viewers. For Foster, this was the best proof that the old metaphor of contagion has become entirely obsolete nowadays. Nevertheless, when we treat the concept of both the human body and contagion as historically chang-

ing, we may find each of these concepts helpful to analyze contemporary performances that go far beyond the borders of traditionally understood mimetic art.

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EXPERIMENTAL MIMESIS IN MODERN BRITISH AND IRISH DRAMA



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“Being Human”: Edward Bond’s Theories of Drama

ABSTRACT

The playwright Edward Bond has recalled the impact of seeing photographs of Nazi atrocities at the end of World War Two: “It was the ground zero of the human soul.” He argues we need a different kind of drama, based in “a new interpretation of what it means to be human.” He has developed an extensive body of theoretical writings to set alongside his plays. Arguably, his own reflections on “what it means to be human” are based in his reaction to the Holocaust, and his attempt to confront “the totality of evil.”

Bond argues we are born “radically innocent.” There is a “pre-psychological” state of being. The neonate does not “read” ideology; it has to use its own imagination to make sense of the world. To enter society, however, the child must be *corrupted*; its imagination is “ideologized.” Bond claims that “radical innocence” can never wholly be lost. Through drama, we can escape “ideology” and recover our “autonomy.” It leads us to confront extreme situations, and to define *for ourselves* “what it means to be human.” The terms of Bond’s theory are Manichean (innocent-corrupt, autonomous-ideologized etc.). His arguments are based in the assumption that there is a fundamental “humanity” that exists prior to socialization. In fact, the process of socialization begins at birth. As an account of child development, “radical innocence” does not stand up to close scrutiny. Arguably, however, Bond’s work escapes the confines of his own theory. It can be read, not in terms of the “ideologized” vs. the “autonomous” mind, but rather, in terms of “conscious” and “unconscious.” In *Coffee* (2000), Bond takes character of Nold on a journey into the Dantean hell of his own unconscious. He does not recover his “innocence,” but, rather, he has to face the darkness of both history and the psyche.

Keywords: Edward Bond, Jung, Holocaust, child development.

The playwright Edward Bond has recalled the impact on him of seeing photographs of Nazi atrocities at the end of the Second World War (when he was 11 years old):

At that moment, the world became old and mankind unfathomable. It was the ground zero of the human soul, the ice at the bottom of Dante's hell. . . . Really, we all died in Auschwitz. I sometimes think humanity itself died there. It didn't make any sense. Instead of the devil lurking somewhere around ready to catch you, suddenly we were confronted with the totality of evil. It was there as a fact even though you had survived. (qtd. in Tuaille, *Playwright* 17–18)

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Bond argues we are living in new times, and therefore need a different kind of drama, based in “a new interpretation of what it means to be human” (“Le théâtre”).¹ Arguably, his own reflections on “what it means to be human” are based in his reaction to the horrors of Auschwitz; and his drama is an attempt not only to address the question: “Why did it happen?” (qtd. in Tuaille, *Playwright* 191), but also to confront “the totality of evil”—to stare into the face of the “Gorgon” (to use Primo Levi's term).²

*

Bond has developed an extensive body of theoretical writings, to set alongside his plays. As well as the book *The Hidden Plot* (2000), there have been numerous articles, and (to date) five volumes of letters. A key moment in the development of his theories came in 1983, when he undertook a series of drama workshops with students at the University of Palermo. He devised a scenario for an improvisation: a soldier is given an order to perpetrate an inhuman act. He/she is told to take a baby from the street where they live and kill it. Two babies live in the street: the soldier's own sibling, and a neighbour's child. The students performed the scene a number of times; but each time, the student playing the soldier chose to kill the sibling, rather than the neighbour's child. None of them “could bring himself to kill the ‘right’ baby. It was a paradox” (Bond, *Plays*: 6 247). Bond himself had anticipated that this would happen. The students, however, were per-

¹ All translations from the French are by the authors, with the support of Steph Terpant.

² “. . . we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. . . . [W]e are those who . . . did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the . . . complete witnesses” (Levi 70).

plexed. The improvisation had confounded all their expectations. As John Doona has observed:

The Palermo Improvisation describes the uncovering of a paradox in which the human individual acts in a manner which, to the understanding of the world, should be impossible. We all know that “Blood is thicker than water” and that “We look after our own.” (97)

Bond draws a parallel with a real-life incident, when a Russian guard, who was serving in a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp, was ordered to shoot his own brother, and refused, even though he knew that this would not save his brother, and could lead to his own death. Bond claims that the guard’s decision, and the students’ actions in the Palermo improvisation, came from the “same paradox” (*Plays*: 6 251). What exactly *is* this “paradox,” then?

Bond argues that we are born “radically innocent.” This is the newborn child’s desire “to be at home in the world, and that requires that the world be a home” (Bond, “Modern Drama” 25):

. . . the individual has a right to be. If you have a right to be, then you say to yourself, “well, where am I going to be?” and you say, “I have to be in my home,” and the infant believes that its right is that the world should be its home. That’s a basic premise of the human mind. (Bond, “Quality”)

The child expects “that it will be given not only food but emotional reassurance, that its vulnerability will be shielded, that it will be born into a world waiting to receive it, and that knows how to receive it” (Bond, *Lear* lx). Later, this becomes a desire that the world should be a place of peace and justice. The need for justice, then, is not a psychological need, but “a structural requirement in the human mind” (Bond, “Questions”)—a human imperative, that begins in the infant. This, Bond notes, reverses our usual assumptions; we think justice is learnt, rather than an existential necessity (see *Hidden Plot* 142).

Bond believes that the need for justice is by nature altruistic. The child’s desire that the world should be a “home” becomes the imperative to make the world the shared home of all people: “This is not an idealist wish, it is existential logic. . . . It is the necessity of human history” (Bond, “Density”). It is notable that the Palermo improvisation focused on the threat to a child. It is as if this is the Bondian “primal encounter”: the recognition of the Child-as-Other, and its “right to be”—based in an innate

conviction, that our desire for the world to be a “home” *has* to extend to others.

Bond argues, then, that we have a *need* for justice; but the society we live in is unjust. This creates a conflict, a “structural problem” in the self (Bond, “Le sens” 139). He insists, however, that “radical innocence” can never wholly be lost or suppressed. Rather, innocence and corruption “constantly dramatically agon-ise” in our minds (letter to Woodruff, 2005). Extreme situations expose this antimony: in them, we must decide for ourselves “what it is to be human” (Bond, *Hidden Plot* 48). No external authority can make the choice for us: “The students [in Palermo] were committed to being themselves: ‘You are the person who decides this’” (Bond qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 101).

The “paradox” in Bond, then, is the moment when “radical innocence” reasserts itself. It is “the confrontation of humanness with ideology, radical innocence with corruption” (*Plays: 8* 220). Following his experience at Palermo, Bond placed the “paradox” at the heart of his drama. He has used variations on it in plays such as *Great Peace* (1984) and *Jackets* (1989). (In *Great Peace*, for example, a soldier is given an order to kill a child; he chooses his own baby sister, rather than a neighbour’s child.) The aim is to confront the audience, “to make them responsible for their own assessment and involvement in what is being shown” (Bond qtd. in D. Davis, “Commentary” xxxvii). However, the “choice” which Bond identifies in the “paradox,” between “human” and inhuman, is stark and reductive. One choice is “right” and the other is “wrong.” (Bond states that the students “got it right!—they did not make the conventional decision” [letter to Allen, 2004].)³ He maintains: “What I think appears in the ‘Palermo Paradox’ is the mind’s insistence on its own nobility, its own integrity—that is its shared humanness” (qtd. in Stuart, *Letters* 5 185). The implication is that there is some form of “categorical moral imperative” at work, which reasserts itself in extreme situations, even against our own reason or will.⁴

³ David Davis has argued: “Unlike with Brecht, there is no right way to respond to Bond’s plays. Each member of the audience has to find his or her own humanness or confirm his or her own corruption” (“Commentary” xxxvii). In other words: there *is* a right and a wrong way to respond!

⁴ Bond recognizes that his concept of “radical innocence,” and the use in his plays of moments of “absolute self-confrontation,” may be compared to Kant’s categorical moral imperative; but, he argues, “Kant interpreted it too rigidly because he did not see that in the moment we become responsible for reality and do not merely conform to it” (“Mind” 15). He has also observed: “Kant said that respect for the moral law—justice—was universal but he couldn’t say why: ‘. . . all human reason is totally incapable of explaining [it] . . . and all the effort and labour to seek such an explanation is waste.’ Kant is wrong. The imperative to be human is also the imperative to *create* justice” (“First Word” 36).

Bond insists that “radical innocence” is “not a natural state, an aspect of human nature existing outside history and society” (*Plays*: 6 254); and yet, he also states that it is “inherent in our natural self” (“Density”). He has developed his own model of the “self.” He argues that, in the newly-born child (or neonate), there is a “pre-psychological” state of being, which he terms the “pre-self” (“Modern Drama” 24). It might be more accurate to describe this as a pre-social state, because it exists prior to socialization and acculturation. The mind’s first activity, Bond contends, is to interpret the world, and to give it meaning. The child begins to make sense of the world by “imagining” it. It has to use its imagination to give meanings to all the things that surround it. It does not “read” ideology: “No person or authority intervenes between its imagination and the world” (*Plays*: 7 107).

Bond, then, sees in the neonate a comprehending spontaneity. The child “creates” meaning. To enter society, however, the child must be corrupted; its imagination is “ideologized.” The neonate “creates and owns the world” (*Plays*: 7 103), and so feels responsible for it; but in accepting the teachings of society, we abdicate responsibility. Bond believes that, through drama, we can recover our autonomy. In the “paradoxical” situations of drama, he claims,

the mind is forced to return to the structures of creativity, which originate in the neonate in the creation of its self (and initially its self-world). I say “forced” because drama makes the situations urgent, unavoidable. (letter to Roper, 2003)

Thus, drama “re-reverses the human process, which ideology has parasitised and deformed” (*Plays*: 8 219–20). The self “is returned to the core self” (*Plays*: 8 213).⁵ The only real evidence Bond offers for the existence of this “core self,” however, is the reaction of the students in Palermo. David Davis suggests that the improvisation was “touching the ‘pre-self’ of the actor. He . . . was in touch with what was most fundamental to his humanity, whose origins are in the radical innocence of the young child” (“Edward Bond” 168). This is naïve, however. Bond’s arguments are based in the assumption that there is a fundamental “humanity” that exists prior to socialization, and which can be uncovered (or rediscovered) through drama. In fact, the process of socialization begins from birth. As Howard Gardner has observed, from the very first moment when “parents react

⁵ Elsewhere, Bond argues that we cannot re-enter the neonate’s state—“the effects would be infantile” (*Hidden Plot* 140); at the same time, “by another route, [it] may enter our later state” (*Plays*: 8 207).

to the sex of their newly sighted offspring, the child enters into a world that is rich in interpretations and meanings, all introduced courtesy of the assumptions of the culture in which he happens to be born" (39). Bond himself has written that the mind "is socially formed and not the other way round" (qtd. in Stuart, *Letters* 4 27). The child's imagination cannot, then, be autonomous.

As an account of child development, "radical innocence" does not stand up to close scrutiny. Arguably, the concept allows Bond to find his own answers to the horrors of Auschwitz. It posits a state of "innocence" outside the corruption of "ideology." It is as if the "agon" between human and inhuman is really taking place in Bond himself. The terms of his theory are Manichean: innocent-corrupt, egotistic-altruistic, and so on. However, as we will see, these elements "constantly dramatically agonise" in the plays. Rather than "solving" the problem of "humanness," what Bond shows is the continual *struggle* to define the self, in the face of the "inhuman."

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In the play *Coffee* (2000), the central character is a soldier called Nold. In the climactic scene, he refuses an order he has been given to shoot two civilians. He tells his superior officer: "I can't do what yer want. I don't know why" (*Plays*: 7 203). It is as if the impulse rises in him unbidden; the officer's orders are opposed, it seems, by another, more powerful "order" or imperative. Alain Françon (who directed the original production at the *Théâtre national de la Colline* in Paris⁶) claims that, in this moment, Nold "starts to become a human being." However, the situation may be read differently.

In his introduction to *The War Plays* (1985), Bond writes:

Our unconscious is not more animal than our conscious, it is often even more human. The unconscious sees through us and our social corruption and sends us messages of our humanity, ingeniously and persistently trying to reconcile the divisive tensions in our lives. (*Plays*: 6 250)

In this analysis, Bond evidently locates "radical innocence" in the unconscious (or even equates the two). However, it also suggests another possible way of reading the plays—not in terms of the "ideologized" vs. the "autonomous" mind, but, rather, in terms of *conscious* and *unconscious*.

⁶ First performance was on 12 May 2000.

Jung argued that unconscious processes “stand in a compensatory relation to the conscious mind” (*Collected* 7 177). It is as if the unconscious sends signals, alerting us to things which are overlooked, repressed or undervalued by the conscious mind. Dreams, for example, are seen by Jung as “*the natural reaction of the self-regulating psychic system*” (*Collected* 18 110; italics in original); they address a problem or seek (in this sense) to “reconcile the divisive tensions in our lives.” In the case of Nold, as we will see, Bond introduces elements which disrupt the settled world of the character’s “ego.” Arguably, they stem from the character’s unconscious (rather than some form of “pre-self”), and take him on a (compensatory) journey into the darkness of his own psyche.

The opening scene in the play is called the “The First House.” Nold is at home, preparing to eat a meal. His concern at this stage, it seems, is for his own comfort—with making the world a “home,” if only for himself: “I got a good job. Tech one day a week. Savin up. Get married. People get on with me, I get on with them” (*Plays*: 7 126). The bareness of the room—there is only a table and chair, and two doors—conveys his isolation from the world. It is also an image, perhaps, of the “self-sufficiency” of the ego. (Jung suggests that a house may be read as an image of the individual ego or consciousness—see Jung, *Children’s* 411.) At the same time, it is evident that Nold, at this stage, is concerned to conform to social “norms” (marriage etc.). In this sense, his mind is “socialized” or “ideologized.” His isolation is disrupted, however, by the entrance of a stranger. A man, Gregory, stands in the doorway in silence. Nold has his back to him, and does not look at him, but senses he is there. “What d’yer want?” he asks (*Plays*: 7 126); but Gregory simply leaves without saying a word. Nold feels compelled to follow. With Gregory’s entrance, then, Nold is disturbed in his “self-sufficiency.” As we will see, Gregory functions in the play to some extent as Nold’s alter-ego (or Jungian “shadow”). Bond himself describes him thus: “Nold may have created Gregory—or he may exist as a reality he would like to avoid. . . . Nold is haunted by Gregory because he needs him to face himself, to create himself” (qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 139).

Gregory materializes, then, as a mysterious (imaginary) phantom. As David Tuailleon has observed, he is “ghostly, mute and even somnambulist”; an “emissary of the imagination” (Tuailleon, “L’horreur” 291), conjured up from Nold’s unconscious. For the audience, too, the character’s appearance is an unexplained irruption, causing a sense of dislocation.

Bond observes that, in leaving the house, Nold (whose name is evidently a conflation of “new” and “old”) embarks on

a journey, which I think is a journey of creativity; that he wants to experience those extreme situations which define the resources we have of

being human. . . . You have to go into that experience, in order to find the reason for living. ("Video")

This follows the Bondian "template" for drama—"the journey for, to humanness" (letter to Bryanston, 2000), which will lead to the recovery of "radical innocence." It implies that Nold is *consciously* seeking extreme situations, to find the "reason for living." But in fact, from the moment he follows Gregory, his actions seem involuntary, as if he himself does not know why he is doing things. It might be argued, in Jungian terms, that his unconscious is *compensating* for something he is neglecting or repressing, drawing him out of his self-sufficiency, and disrupting the stability of the ego. The action of the play seems, in fact, to be taking place in Nold's mind, unfolding as in a dream ("it's happening in his head" [Bond qtd. in Tuallion, *Playwright* 146]).

In the next scene, Nold follows Gregory to a dark opening in a forest; there is a hole in the ground, leading to an underground hovel. A mother and her daughter are living in the hovel (called "The Second House" in the script). Bond omits the usual reference points we would be given in a more realistic drama, which would explain exactly who these new characters are, why they are living in the hovel etc. Rather, it is as if this is a scene in a fairytale, "where kids get lost in the forest where a wicked witch lives and they have strange tasks to perform—but it is also Dante's forest which stands in the midst of existence and hides the door to hell" (Bond qtd. in Tuallion, *Playwright* 145). Forests are often seen as an image of the unconscious (see Jung, *Children's* 262). The hovel, Bond suggests, may be seen as "the place of dreams, the place of unconscious creation"; and indeed, "All of Scene Two seems to occur in a hole—and there is a hole in this hole" ("Notes sur *Café*" 68, 71).

Bond notes that the scene is set "in the world of the imagination because this is how the infant experiences its relationship with the material world and this is what makes us human" (qtd. in Tuallion, *Playwright* 145). In part, Bond claims, we continue to "understand our adult world as a child. . . . Adults never face any problem that they have not already faced as a child in its rawest form" (145). This suggests, then, that Nold is regressing to a child's point-of-view. But the fairytale element also suggests a shift into the unconscious. It reinforces the sense that the events may be happening in a dream; or that this is some Jungian encounter with "archetypes" in the psyche.

The Girl who is living in the hovel is a grown woman, but with the mind of a child. Her situation is desperate; it seems she has had to go days without food. Indeed, the women seem to be "forever dying from hunger" (Tuallion, "L'horreur" 291), as if they are caught in some eternal limbo—or in Dante's hell. When Nold tells the Girl that he has already eaten that

morning, and left some food at home, she demands: “Fetch it. Fetch it” (*Plays*: 7 137). The play begins, as we have seen, with Nold setting the table for a meal in his own home, as an image of the self-sufficiency of the ego; so the Girl’s desperate hunger is an image of the opposite: vulnerability and exposure of the self. In this way, the encounter may be seen as a form of “compensation” for Nold. He becomes obsessed with trying to meet her demands. In part, then, what is set up is an “agon” between “for-the-self” and “for-the-Other” (to use Levinas’s terms—see *Totality* 88). Nold moves from preoccupation with his own needs, to caring for the Other. (Gregory, in contrast, seems untouched by the women’s plight; he even steals their last morsel of bread.)

When the Woman enters, she sees Nold at first as a threat, and she is fierce in defence of her child (“I’d kill for my daughter. I stay alive for ’er”—*Plays*: 7 133). It is, again, as if she has stepped from a fairytale: she is “like a fighting Yaga” (Tuailleon, “L’horreur” 291; italics in original). Bond sees the relationship between mother and daughter as emblematic of “humanness”:

The Woman with the Girl shows what a motherly relationship is: she comforts her, makes her daughter endure hunger and threats or cope with her own fears and hopes. We see how this relationship produces humanness—the human passion can be expressed in the very gentle act of washing hands. (qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 146)

We may recall here Jung’s description of the “Mother” archetype, which embraces “maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female . . . all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility” (Jung, *Archetypes* 82). Arguably, the Woman’s behaviour shifts Nold into adopting the “mother’s” role, in caring for the girl and trying to get food for her. In other words, the “imperative” at work is not simply the need to take responsibility for the Other; rather, it is about responding to the “maternal” archetype, and protecting the Child-as-Other.

Bond sees Gregory as the embodiment of an “ideologized” mind⁷—he tries to teach Nold that, in order to survive, “he has to let himself be corrupt” (qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 139). This makes it seem as if his function in the play is schematic: he is simply the “corrupting” agent, the “ideologizing” force. Bond also sees him as “a sort of father [to Nold], who looks at the education of his son. He represents authority, wisdom, what Virgil is to Dante—and he will be his guide in hell” (qtd. in Tuailleon,

⁷ “Gregory’s is this ideological interpretation of reality” (Bond qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 139).

Playwright 139). In Lacanian terms, then, Gregory represents initiation into the “symbolic order” (see Lacan, *Freud’s Papers* 220–33). However, the character is also defined in his relationship to the “Mother” archetype.

It is significant that Gregory, when he first appears, has a bandage around his head. At this stage in the play, arguably, he represents the damaged ego. (Bond specifies the bandage is blood-stained on the left side—i.e. the rational, logical side of the brain [*Plays*: 7 125].)⁸ At the start of Scene Two (and before the two women appear), Gregory is still in a somnambulist state, and he is talking in his sleep; his language is a strange, dreamlike stream-of-consciousness. (Bond observes that “thought often escapes in sleep, when it cannot articulate the situation consciously”; and in this play, the characters frequently fall into “a trance of sleep” [“Notes sur *Café*”].) It appears he is dreaming about the Woman, seeing her as a threat to him, like some monster or ogre (“She took the bones out a ’er body ’n thrashed me with ’em” [*Plays*: 7 129]). Later, when Gregory is awake again, he warns Nold about her:

NOLD. Yer know ’er?

GREGORY. No—worse! I never ’eard ’er—never saw ’er—but she got inside me when I slept! (*Plays*: 7 131)

In Gregory’s dream, then, the Woman is a destabilizing force, invading his unconscious. He sees her as a kind of witch; and we may recall that Jung formulated an antithesis between “the loving and the terrible mother” (*Archetypes* 82). The counterpart to the “nurturing” Mother is “anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrible and inescapable like fate” (82). Nold and his “shadow” Gregory, then, are locked together in their opposing responses to the “maternal” archetype.

Bond conceives the Girl as a kind of “neonate”:

The Girl is not fully mentally aware, she is like a baby. She really is this aspect of Nold which has to learn, and she lives both in fear and joy towards the unknown. She is in the position of always being born. She constantly

uses her imagination to search for the meaning of what she sees and experiences by producing images. (qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 146)

⁸ At the play’s climax, Nold shoots Gregory in the head; so the bandage he wears in the first scenes actually suggests that this event has *already happened*, and Gregory is a kind of ghost. This is one of the play’s games with time. It is as if, on some level, Gregory knows at the start that the Woman is a threat to him, and will lead to his “death.”

These images “are very direct, they are a form of knowledge in themselves, they don’t need to be interpreted but seen” (146). Bond’s account implies that the Girl has a child’s “autonomy” of the imagination, and this is what Nold needs to learn. But we also have to see that, throughout the scene, her images play on the liminal border between life and death. For example, at one point she says: “All the dolls died long ago. We’re sillier than them: we play with little dead things ’n pretend they’re alive” (*Plays*: 7 135). In her state of eternal hunger, the nearness of death is mirrored in her words. Arguably, she becomes a kind of “guide” (or psychopomp) to Nold to this limbo, or zone of death. She engages him—and the viewer—in the *imaginal* experience of death. At one point, for example, she is talking in her sleep, and she cries as she imagines her doll drowning:

She’s in the river—the ’and’s comin through the pebbles on the bot-
tom—the pebbles are eyes—I can see ’er drown . . . the doll gave birth t’
little mice when it drowned—their little tongues are lickin at the sky—
(*Plays*: 7 139–40)

The images are, on one level, like a child’s “night terrors.” When Nold sees her crying, he says: “She mustn’t cry like that! . . . Somethin’s breakin inside ’er! . . . she’s tearin inside” (*Plays*: 7 139–40). It is as if something is breaking inside *him*. In this way, within his own “dream” (“it’s happening in his head”), Nold is brought to share, not only in another’s suffering, but also—in a very visceral way—in her “night terrors” and dreams of death.

It seems dubious, however, to see this as a *child’s* way of seeing or “imagining” (albeit it is presented by Bond as “childlike”). Rather, this is the language of the unconscious, where “thoughts” are expressed in a dream-like, intuitive way. As we have seen, Gregory also talks in his sleep in this “dream” register. Bond sets up two worlds in the play—the “factual” and the “imaginative”—and shows them “bleeding” into each other like “black blood” (Bond qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 148). This may also be read as the *unconscious* “bleeding” into the *conscious*.

In Scene Two, Nold leaves the women in search of food; but he returns empty-handed. He has not even been able to find his way home. (By implication, there is no way back for him now, to his previous, “safe” life.) Pressed by the Girl, he leaves again (“I’ll bring yer proper food. . . . I’ll find it, it’s still there”—*Plays*: 7 144); but the next time he returns, he is dressed in a soldier’s battledress. Bond notes that “reality” suddenly breaks in to the “fairy tale” (letter to Birch et al., 1999). It seems that the country is now in a state of war; Nold says: “There’s soldiers everywhere. I ’ad t’ steal a uniform” (*Plays*: 7 158). Subsequently, however, another

soldier enters, and there is another (dreamlike) shift in time and context. It emerges that Nold is now part of a “killing squad.” Again, we are not told how this change has occurred. There is an abrupt reversal in his attitude to the women. The Girl has died; her body lies nearby on the ground, as Nold and the other soldier sit and eat. Here, then, the act of eating is again an image of detachment, and indifference to the (Child-as-)Other. The men even talk about raping the corpse (see *Plays*: 7 160–61). Previously, as we have seen, the “female” principle was embodied as a life-force, in the “Mother” archetype (or “Mother-Child”). But now, it seems, we have entered the “real” (conscious) world; it is run exclusively by men, and women are treated as so much inert matter.

Bond’s starting point, in writing the play, was an incident ostensibly taken from real life. He notes:

In the middle of this play, there is a scene where someone throws away his coffee. It is a true story, which happened at Babi Yar, the site of a massacre in Russia. The soldiers were slaughtering people. They thought they had finished for the day; then someone noticed that there were some people left. They had to make all the soldiers come back. Thinking the day’s work was finished, they were drinking coffee. (Bond, “En situation” 44–45)

The soldiers had slaughtered hundreds in the course of their day’s work. Now, one of them—who had been preparing the coffee—groaned, “More work!”:

Not: more slaughter; more work. And he was so disgusted that he threw away his coffee. That is a paradox. . . . This little gesture contains the paradox of the last century. An entire century rests on this moment, and if you can understand that, you can understand what it means to be human. (44–45)

The incident, for Bond, was “like Galileo discovering the telescope”—enabling him to see the world differently: “I had to explain how it was that that soldier could do that” (“Video”).⁹

⁹ Bond claims that the scene he describes is based on a survivor’s account of the massacre, which he found in a book—but he cannot remember the title of the book, or the author (letter to Birch et al., 1999). One possible source is the book *Babi Yar* by Anatoly Kuznetsov (1970). This includes an account by a survivor, Dina Pronicheva, who recalled that when she entered the quarry—the scene of the massacre—she could make out a group of German soldiers, who had lit a bonfire, and were making coffee on it (see Kuznetsov 109), There

The action is significant for Bond as an image of human “corruption”: “Evil is throwing away the coffee. . . . Evil is our attempt to be at home in this world—to earn our coffee and drink it in peace” (*Hidden Plot* 165–66). In other words: in the midst of slaughter, the soldier is only concerned with his own needs and comfort. As Bond observes, the action “exemplifies Hannah Arendt’s idea of the ‘banality of evil’: nothing is more banal than a coffee cup—but evil is the least banal of things.” He even claims that “the horror of the coffee is more disturbing to face than the horror of Hiroshima and the death camps because it is about the perpetrators and not the victims” (qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 141). In other words: facing the “Gorgon” (Levi 70) may be less about trying to imagine the *victims’* experience than confronting the human capacity for evil.

The action of drinking coffee in this context is an image of what Levinas terms *jouissance*: the individual’s consumption of the pleasures the world can offer. As Colin Davis notes, Levinas’s concept of “living from . . .” (“*vivre de . . .*”) suggests

a mode of identity with the world which confirms the identity and sovereignty of the self; the world is fully available to me, ready to meet my needs and fulfill my desires. This situation is characterized by what Levinas calls enjoyment (*jouissance*), the exhilaration of the self in its possession of the world. (43)

“All enjoyment [*jouissance*] is in this sense alimentation,” Levinas (111). “Living from” things is “essentially egoist” (Levinas 114). The action of drinking coffee embodies, then, the self-sufficiency of the ego.

It is notable, moreover, that the soldiers in Bond’s account see their task, not as slaughter, but simply as “work.” As David Tuailon observes, despite “the enormity of the crime they are to commit, these men always obey a rule, and retain a strong sense of their rights, as well as their welfare” (Tuailon, “L’horreur” 289). Their discourse remains, in other words, within the “symbolic register,” the ordinary world of “laws and contracts” (Lacan 230). Personal desire (*jouissance*) coincides with, or functions within, the social system. (As we have seen, at the start of the play, Nold is also locked into this world, with his dedication to work, money, marriage etc.) Moreover, there is an opposition running through

is no reference in this account, however, to a soldier overturning a coffee pot. In one interview, Bond also referred to an incident in a story by Zola, about a group of soldiers who were desperate to drink their coffee (“Video”). It is possible the two incidents have simply become merged in Bond’s mind.

the play, between the *male* world of “work” (which is rational/“real”—the world of ego, order and power), and the “irrational”/unconscious world associated with the women.

Bond observes that he called the scenes in the play “houses” (“The First House,” “The Second House” etc.) to suggest to the audience: “All of this is happening in your house. Babi Yar is a consequence of your ‘house-ness’” (qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 139). There is an implication that the individual, living in the security of his/her own home, is yet implicated in a system that can perpetuate atrocities such as Babi Yar. At the same time, the play is holding up a mirror to us, as spectators, and our *own* desire to live “for-the-self” as opposed to “for-the-other,” and to remain within the self-contained “house” of the ego.

The next scene in the play (“The Big Ditch”) is based on the incident Bond has described at Babi Yar. A ravine is being used for executions. Bond notes that the play now moves from the imaginary to the factual, to a scene from “history” (qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 149).¹⁰ He observes: “. . . before the play sends Nold to Babi Yar it puts him in this situation where the basic patterns of human self and society appear: what determines you as you are becoming human.” The scene in the forest is “like opening the situation [of Babi Yar] to see what is involved in it” (qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 144). In other words: the scene in the forest is the Bondian “primal encounter,” which puts Nold in touch with his “radical innocence” (but we may see it, rather, as a signal or irruption from the unconscious).

Even as the play shifts to the “factual,” the new scene may be seen to some degree as a *continuation* of Nold’s “dream”; as if he “visits” Babi Yar in his imagination (and by extension, so does the audience). (Similarly, in Bond’s 1997 play *At the Inland Sea*, a young boy pays a “visit” in his imagination to the gas chambers of the Holocaust.) Moreover, the juxtaposition of “fairytale” and “real” makes the situation in Babi Yar seem, in its own way, irrational, nightmarish, “unreal” (“. . . this is Babi Yar that should be imaginary, a vicious phantom—but it isn’t” [Bond qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 148]).

The soldiers in the scene are perched on a cliff top above the ravine, their guns trained on a ledge on the opposite cliff-face; groups of victims are sent out onto the ledge to be executed, and then fall to their deaths into the ditch. As the scene starts, the soldiers are beginning to pack their guns away, as if they have simply come to the end of an ordinary day’s work.

¹⁰ We should note that even though the scene is based on the incident in Babi Yar, Bond avoids locating it in the specific historical period. He “even demands that the play is performed in the contemporary uniforms of the country in which it is presented” (Tuailon, “L’horreur” 285).

Coffee is being prepared. The location is designated as “The Big Ditch,” but the image of the brewing coffee-pot makes it seem another of the play’s “houses” (with the soldiers creating a form of “home-from-home”).

Then, the soldiers learn that there are some more victims to be executed. They have run out of ammunition, and so they have to pick the victims off with their rifles, one-by-one, meaning that they have time to observe the deaths, as if in slow motion. The men mock the suffering they see: “O don’t they run!” (*Plays*: 7 181). Meanwhile, Nold and another soldier stand apart, ignoring what is going on, staring at the coffee pot, waiting for it to boil.

Bond notes that there are three “sites” in the scene: “Three different places are put on stage, as if separated by transparent screens” (qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 141). They are: the top of the cliff, where the soldiers are perched; the ravine, where the victims are shot; and audience itself, which occupies its own “site.” The soldiers are “witnesses” who do not “see”: throwing away the coffee demonstrates that “they only see their own petty vexations and don’t have any true understanding of their own situation” (qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 142). There is *jouissance* in the shadow of death. In this context, it even seems to imply a *blindness* to death. The soldiers are locked in the world of “work,” pleasure and desire. They do not recognize that they are in a zone of death; they treat it as if it is “normal.” The scene exposes their *lack* of imagination, their inability to conceive of their victims as human. They are “like people shooting at dolls at the fair” (Bond qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 143).¹¹ The way they talk about the deaths they are witnessing, as a form of spectacle or entertainment, is in contrast to the Girl’s imaginal experience of death in Scene Two. The audience itself is distanced from the event: the soldiers occupy the space between it and the massacre. This may be seen as emblematic of our own distance (as viewers) in space and time from the events of the Holocaust. Moreover, we are compelled to see events through the eyes of the perpetrators (the soldiers), rather than the victims (“O don’t they run!”). At the same time, as viewers, we *can* imagine the victims from the soldiers’ descriptions (for example: “. . . she’s tryin t’ reach the top—clawin the rock—she can’t—’er claws—’er claws’re slippin where the cliffs bin soak with blood” [*Plays*: 7 183]). Our sense of the inhumanity of the soldiers’ actions is amplified by their very *absence* of empathy. The scene implies that we *should* bear witness; but it also makes us aware that we *cannot* see from the victims’ point-of-view—we cannot face “the Gorgon” in this sense, and be “true witnesses” (Levi 70). In fact, we are *implicated*

¹¹ See Tuailleon, “L’horreur” (292–93), for a different account of this scene.

in the event, by being on the “side” of the perpetrators—making us aware of our own wish (like the soldiers), to “live from” things, to remain secure in our own “houses,” locked in our own egos of desire. (As Tuailleon observes, the ordinary world of “men at work and coffee” is the audience’s own, “equally depraved world” before they enter the theatre [“L’horreur” 289].) The scene not only points to our failure to recognize our own “corruption”; it makes us confront the terrible realization that *we* could be—or even, we *are*—the men on the cliff.

At the same time, the “rational,” “real” world of the soldiers is emphatically an all-male world. The “ravine” itself can be seen as an image of the unconscious which is being repressed. What happens in the next scene (“The Third House”) is another “irruption.” Nold descends to the bottom of the ravine, which is filled with the bodies of the dead and dying. Bond specifies that the actual bodies do not need to be shown (*Plays*: 7 188); and indeed, in the first production of the play (at the *Colline theatre*), *the corpses were not represented*. This avoids the danger of turning the massacre into a spectacle for the viewer’s consumption; but it also means that the action is, on some level, *imaginary*, as if it is taking place in the unconscious. Nold has been given the task of finishing off any survivors. Two women are still alive; they are the mother and daughter from “The Second House.” Bond suggests that it is as if the “imaginary” world of the second scene now irrupts into the “real” world (of the war).¹² Indeed, he argues that the characters “are always in the Second House but they don’t know it objectively” (qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 150)—in other words, it remains present in the unconscious. (It is “the place of unconscious creation” [“Notes sur *Café*” 68].) The ravine is another zone of the dead; and, indeed, there is something dreamlike in the appearance of the two women amid the “corpses” (as if this is, again, some metaphysical limbo or Dantean hell). Moreover, their presence re-introduces the element of “fairytale.” The world of the imagination “bleeds” into the “real”; or, rather, perhaps, the unconscious “bleeds” into conscious.

There is no indication in the text that Nold recognizes the women; and yet, it is as if the sense of responsibility he felt for them previously is now revived. At first, he seems intent on shooting them. He aims his rifle at the Girl, and threatens to kill her first, before the mother; the latter’s response is to emit a low sound, “almost a growl” (*Plays*: 7 190). He is astonished by the way that—even though she is injured—the mother is determined to defend her daughter, and is even willing to die for her. He says: “Why? Why? ’S no sense ’ere” (i.e. it does not make sense in the midst of so much slaughter)

¹² See Bond, *Hidden Plot* (168).

(*Plays*: 7 190). The mother’s action makes Nold pause in his “work,” and give them some food and drink; prompted, it seems, by signals from his unconscious, and the appeal of the “archetypal maternal.” Without consciously knowing it, he has finally fulfilled the promise he made in Scene Two, to feed them; the women have a “picnic” of a kind, among the dead. (The mother-daughter roles are reversed at one point, when the Girl feeds the Woman, and wipes her face clean [*Plays*: 7 192–93].)

The Girl describes the bodies of the dead that surround her:

All the dead look the same. They’re wearin my mother’s death mask. (*Looks at the WOMAN.*) Cover it! Cover it! Are all these dead people yer dolls? (*Stares round angrily.*) Why are they starin at me! They should ’ide under their sheets! That one bit ’er lips when she died—’er teeth’re comin through ’er chin! (*Plays*: 7 190)

In the absence of actual bodies on stage, we (as viewers) “see” the dead through her eyes. It is, indeed, as if she is dreaming, and they are “night terrors” that haunt her. She is, again, using childlike, “fairytale” imagery (“Are all these dead people yer dolls?”). This becomes the “distorting mirror” through which the horrors of the Holocaust are evoked.¹³

Gregory has entered; he observes Nold’s actions. He is now Nold’s superior officer, and he insists that Nold must follow orders and kill the women. What ensues is a battle-of-wills between them. Bond observes:

Nold and Gregory are disputing the meaning of human reality. For Nold this is a battle to become human. Then the scene is not so much about giving orders, obey or disobey them, but about taking the responsibility for the whole human species. (qtd. in Tuailleon, *Playwright* 151)

Gregory realizes that Nold has started to see the women not as victims, but as “uman bein’s.” He is alarmed by the fact that Nold has given them food: “They don’t ’ave t’ ’ave a last meal. Only ’umans need ceremonies” (*Plays*: 7 193). Then, he tells Nold (and another soldier, Simon) to sit and eat, there among the corpses. Now, however, it is hard for them simply to focus on their own enjoyment. The women continue to eat, with the Girl feeding scraps to her mother; while Nold crouches awkwardly, eating

¹³ Irving Howe has suggested that the only way to represent the Holocaust in artistic form is to use indirect means, as if through a reflection in a mirror or shield (like Perseus in his battle with Medusa) (Howe 282). Giving us the Girl’s “point-of-view” on the massacre produces a form of estrangement—or shows it in a distorting mirror.

“mechanically with a bowed head,” and Simon “takes one mouthful and retches” (*Plays*: 7 194).

As we have seen, in the “dream” world of Scene Two, Gregory seems to embody the damaged (male) ego, terrified by the Woman as a force “that is terrible and inescapable like fate” (Jung, *Archetypes* 82). Now, however, he speaks as the voice of (male) “reason.” He appeals to Nold on the basis of a future life of *jouissance* (which is also a life of conformity to the social order):

When this war’s over you lads’ll look me up. Both a’ yer. We’re not grand but it’s comfortable. I’m suited. The wife cooks. She’s got mirrors in every room. Yer’ll get a surprise when yer see our town. There’s a park. ’Eated swimmin pool. (*Plays*: 7 196–97)

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We have to see Gregory, not simply as a character, but rather as a voice in Nold’s head—part of the internal “agon” that is taking place in him, between the pull of the ego on the one hand, and the signals from his “unconscious” on the other.

Gregory throws some food in the air, which sends the Girl scurrying among the corpses to collect the pieces together—anxious that the “dead’ll get it!” (*Plays*: 7 196). She even stamps on the face of a dead woman, thinking she has her mouth open to catch the food. Then, Gregory encourages her to go and “play”:

GREGORY: . . . Girlie don’t play too far. Stay where I can keep ’n eye on yer.
GIRL (*off*): I’m playin with the children.
GREGORY (*calls*). Don’t play too rough. (*Plays*: 7 197)

He speaks to her as if he is her parent, and they are simply on a normal day-out together in the park. She plays among the dead as if they are, to her, so many “living dolls.” At one point she describes what happened when she tugged on a rope around the neck of a corpse: “’E slid along the ground. All the dead people bobbed up t’ see” (*Plays*: 7 198). It seems that Gregory (aware that Nold now sees the women as “human”) has manipulated her, to create this grotesque, nightmarish spectacle (as a contrast, perhaps, to the “idyll” he paints of ordinary life back home).

Nold cannot understand his own actions in refusing to obey Gregory’s orders. He tells him: “I can’t do what yer want. I don’t know why” (*Plays*: 7 203). Gregory, too, is driven by need: he is desperate to suppress this act of rebellion, to maintain the social order he understands (the “male” world of ego, order and power). Nold finally raises his gun;

he appears about to shoot the girl, but then he turns the gun on Gregory, and kills him instead. As we have seen, Alain Françon argues that, in this moment, Nold “starts to become a human being.” In this analysis, then, it is as if—like the students in Palermo—he finally rebels against the “inhuman” social order, and rediscovers his “radical innocence.” He makes the “right” choice.

In the scenes set in Babi Yar, Bond takes us, as audience members, to the “ground zero of the human soul” (qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 17). However, in then showing a “humane” act in the midst of the inhuman, it could be argued that Bond is actually letting the audience off the hook—reassuring us that we did not all “die” in Auschwitz, after all; and there is an innate humanness, a need to care for the Other, and make the world a “home” for all.

We may read Nold’s actions differently, however, as the culmination of the “agon” in him. He has defeated his own “shadow”; but the result is that he can never feel secure again in his ego. The play ends in some ways as it begins. The final scene—called “The Fourth House”—is set, like the first, in a living room, with table and chairs. But now, it is Nold who is the “stranger at the door.” He has arrived at the house where Gregory used to live, where he meets the man’s daughter. (She is the only “real,” as opposed to archetypal or imaginary female character in the play. She has a baby daughter—heard off-stage; so Nold is encountering a situation “for real” which echoes his imagined experiences.) Nold sits at the table. Bond observes: “. . . the play looks at all the problematic of being human—but you still have to get up in the morning. That is why at the end we see Nold sitting at a kitchen table once again . . .” (qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 153). But this house has been bombed in raids, which are still going on. (A blackout curtain half-covers a window.) Thus, the house can offer only a temporary refuge from the outside world (or “home” for the ego).

When Gregory’s daughter asks Nold what happened to him, he says: “I survived, I survived” (*Plays*: 7 216). Bond comments:

. . . it is true: he came out of the pit of Babi Yar alive and his innocence has not been corrupted by his experience. He says so with his eyes, fists and jaws clenched—he knows what it costs: it is written in his own darkness. This could be an answer to the problem of the coffee cup but it won’t solve all his dilemmas. (qtd. in Tuailon, *Playwright* 193)

The ambiguity of this ending leaves it open, however, to a different interpretation, which Bond may or may not have intended. Nold’s clenched fists and teeth may suggest that he is barely able to hold on

to a residual sense of self, in the face of his experiences. He has had to confront the capacity for inhumanness, including his own. He has stared into the face of the Gorgon—and recognized himself. He cannot now return to the conscious (male) world of work, money and marriage; at the same time, the unconscious (female) world has not been redeemed: the Woman and Girl have both died. His imagination—which was suppressed when he stood on the cliff in Babi Yar, waiting for the coffee to boil—now has to encompass the sufferings of others. There is a baby crying off-stage. (The woman says: “I can’t stop ‘im cryin. ’E ain little—it’s the raids” [*Plays*: 7 215].) The sound represents a new “irruption,” a new demand on Nold, to take responsibility for the Child-as-Other. (The crying could be a voice in his head, as if his unconscious is calling to him again.) However, he does not move. It might be said that, as he sits at the table (the site of solitary *jouissance*), he is continuing to struggle, not so much against the desire to live “for-the-self,” but with the terrible responsibility of living “for-the-other.” Moreover, it is significant that he does not speak about his experience except to say, “I survived.” These are the last words in the play; the rest is silence, as if he *cannot* say more. He may be seen as an image of the “true witness,” to use Levi’s phrase: the “drowned” survivor, who has seen the “Gorgon,” but has returned mute, unable to express what they saw (Levi 70). Far from starting to “become a human being” (Françon), then, it could be argued that Nold is someone who has “touched bottom” and become “non-human” (Agamben 54). The world for him has become “old and mankind unfathomable” (Bond qtd. in Tuillon, *Playwright* 17–18). The irony here is that the perpetrator has become the survivor, the “witness.” He may also be experiencing some “survivor shame” (see Levi 64)—aware, for example, that his actions did not, in the end, make any difference: the Girl he rescued was later shot by some soldiers. (He has failed her then, just as he did earlier, in “The Second House.”)

In this reading, the play—paradoxically—contradicts Bond’s own theories. It does not show a solution to the problem of “being human.” Rather, what Nold experiences is a journey into his own Dantean hell, and the darkness of both history and the psyche. He becomes burdened by a terrible knowledge. As he sits at the table, he has to face the burden of accepting responsibility for his own self, let alone the whole world.

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Caryl Churchill's Artificial and Orificial Bodies: Between Subjective and Non-Subjective Nobody's Emotion or Affect

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the shift from emotion to affect in Caryl Churchill's writing for the theatre, a process which becomes prominent in the later seventies and culminates in the production of *A Mouthful of Birds*, a project designed jointly with the choreographer David Lan. The effects of the transformation remain traceable in *The Skriker*, a complex play taking several years to complete. It is argued that there is a tangible and logical correlation between Churchill's dismantling of the representational apparatus associated with the tradition of institutional theatre—a process which involves, primarily, a dissolution of its artificially constructed, docile bodies into orificial ones—and her withdrawal from the use of emotional expression in favour of the affective. In the following examination, emotions are conceived as interpretative acts modelled on cognition and mediated through representations while the intensity of affect remains unstructured. Often revealed through violence, pain and suffering, affect enables the theatre to venture into the pre-cognitive and thus beyond the tradition of liberal subject formation.

Keywords: Caryl Churchill, body, emotion, affect.

This article seeks to examine the ways in which Caryl Churchill deploys emotions and addresses their use in a selection of plays which strive to transgress the traditional boundaries of *institutional theatre*. The playwright's exploration of the ways her art can dismantle these boundaries intensifies in the seventies, marked by the success of *Cloud 9* (1979),¹ and continues throughout the eighties and early nineties when *The Skriker* (1994) finally makes its way to the stage. This article isolates this particular period for discussion, excluding both the later 90s and the contemporary plays (written after 2000) which experiment with bodies in different contexts, for example scientific (*A Number*, 2002).² The distinction between artificial and orificial bodies, used in the following discussion, serves the purpose of pointing out the spectrum of dependence of the bodies we encounter in the plays on the rules of representation. As Elin Diamond observes, bodies can be either frozen in their subservience to character (artificial bodies) or make an effort to escape absorption into representation, remaining polymorphous or "orificial" ("*(In)visible Bodies*" 190). It is not the aim of this article to engage in a close reading of Churchill's plays. The article focuses primarily on a correlation between the dissolution of representation, and a shift from the use of emotion to affect.

Churchill's writing for the theatre has been perceived as an on-going metamorphosis, an attitude which has rightly earned her the name of an "inventive" playwright whose succession of projects became witness to interrogation and change rather than a consolidation of style and methods. This attitude can be traced back to her early theatrical experience. It included work with such diverse groups as the Monstrous Regiment and The Joint Stock Theatre Company. Leaving aside the differences between the first being a workshopping all-female company and the latter a prevaillingly male group, the essential pursuit of both ensembles was change. While the first was involved in a reaction to stereotypical representations of women on and off-stage, the latter addressed more comprehensive revisions (initiated by Max Stafford-Clark and David Aukin) of *institutionalized* writing for the theatre. Even if in significantly different ways, both companies disputed the authority of the text and, more importantly, addressed the essential domesticating discourses, notably those of representation and realism with their old claims of authenticity and promise of real experience. Both of the categories are in fact fluid and tend to be re-defined against

¹The date given in parenthesis refers to the first production of the play. The same applies to dates which follow the titles of other plays and they appear only when mentioned for the first time.

² An increasingly synergistic relation of the body with technology tends to be affectless. Good examples appear in J. G. Ballard's "steel and concrete" period.

the preceding legislations which are termed outdated and artificial (producing artificial textual bodies) as soon as the newly revised categories of authenticity have been safely absorbed into the current constructions of mimesis/representation, a process assisted by the inevitable and unstoppable semiosis. Concepts of average lives, uncompromising truth and humanity as authenticity criteria successfully mystify the process of theatrical signification against the preceding convention only to be pinned down as either generalization or fiction. In realism, the obscurity of theatrical signification takes off the theatrical mask to produce a seamless conflation of stage and audience expectations. This illusion of mirror-identity, in turn, collapses self-difference, completes the process of false subjectification and reinforces what Elin Diamond called “the arrangements” of the “objective” and “truth-making” world (*Unmaking Mimesis* 5). Both ensembles, though in different ways, revealed this genuine prison-house of representation as neither capable nor in need of circulating cognitive emotion. Resisting this mechanism, Churchill petrified and encased codified emotion by reducing it to a circulation in *aboutness*. There, it would become an object of investigation or a linguistic concept firmly located in the process of story-telling.

Dismantling representation, Churchill questions institutional theatre. By institutional theatre, I understand a national- or city-subsidized theatre model (Cohen 91). It is a theatre “protected because of the cultural values it seems to transmit” and therefore considered “noble” even if its aim is to entertain (Watson 18–19).³ Seminal for the following discussion is the fact that the institution of the theatre, as Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf write, supplies “a model for mimetic social processes” (131) and takes responsibility for its maintenance. Hence the institutional theatre supervises the politics of representation, which includes the appearance of bodies on stage. In Foucauldian terms, mimesis contributes to this system of social discipline and controls the production of artificial, docile bodies.⁴ On the other hand, revisions of this system enable the appearance of porous, orificial bodies on stage. Transformations of artificial bodies into orificial ones are often accompanied by violence (or pain) and, as a result, tend to produce what I would, provisionally, refer to as eruptions of emotion. Sights

³ The “institutional” quality can be traced in the melodrama favoured by the commercial West End, as well.

⁴ Churchill’s interest in disciplinary technologies, explored by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, goes beyond influence. Elin Diamond notices “dozens of references” in her analysis of *Softcops* (“On Churchill” 134). Both Brecht and Foucault provided the playwright with conceptual frames that were to shape her concern with the body-limits of representation (Diamond, “(In)visible Bodies” 191).

of pain, communication and experience of pain are, according to Elaine Scarry, pre-linguistic—they resist and actively destroy language (4–5).

The present explorations, concentrating on the nexus of mimesis/representation and emotion, go beyond radical, *ex-negativo* definitions of the innovative. Among the numerous revisions of the mimetic tradition, the feminist and the postcolonial propositions take on a strongly negative approach. Churchill's affiliations with feminism and postcolonial concepts are unquestionable, for instance in *Cloud 9*. Still, her revisions seem to go beyond the radically negative, showing preference for the more complex. At the same time, her theatre remains at a distance from *par excellence* performance. This distance does not prevent a paradigm shift from the discipline imposed by the machinery of representation towards performance ontology. From a persistent interrogation of mimetic strategies, the playwright turns to emphasizing the effects of immediacy, liveness, non-verbal communication, and intense experience whose traces, as noted by Mateusz Borowski and Małgorzata Sugiera in a more general context, tend to “linger in the emotional and the corporeal memory of the audience” (viii). This suggests potential anchorage in the concept of affect and becomes a tendency interestingly prominent in *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986) and *The Skriker*. The novelty consists in Churchill's shift away from the institutional theatre and in her probing of the emotional potential of a thus expanding theatrical field.

It can be argued that the spectrum of emotion involved in Churchill's plays ranges from subjective (Terada 19) to non-subjective (or nobody's) emotion, from cognitive to what can be called non-cognitive emotion (Chandan 89, Battaly 184). Studies based on the polarity of emotion and affect tend to eliminate the concept of *non-cognitive emotion* as redundant. Emotion is then defined at least as a “minimally interpretative experience” (Terada 4) modelled on cognition (Massumi, *Parables* 28; Anderson 735), mediated and felt through representations (Terada 21) and citational structures (Terada 40). Affect, on the other hand, follows a different logic⁵ and should be conceived as an unformed, unstructured intensity “analyzable in effect” (Massumi, *Parables* 260). Assuming the disciplinary function of mimesis, I would argue that in Churchill's projects the emotion—affect spectrum functions in correlation with the process of unmaking the apparatus

⁵ Daniel M. Gross differentiates between the rhetorical understanding of emotion and the biological. Referring to the early modern theories of emotion, he attempts to demonstrate how they inform recent propositions (Judith Butler) by integrating politics and psychoanalysis. Social constructions of emotion (Michel Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt) are differentiated from affect-oriented research, e.g., Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Adam Frank (xiii–xv).

of representation (mimesis). It is Massumi who also refers to emotion (as opposed to affect) in terms of such a disciplinary strategy. Emotion, he claims, is a “sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience” (*Parables* 28) and thus, potentially, supportive of representation. Hence, by revising and eroding the representational apparatus, Churchill’s plays shift towards non-representation—a radical obliteration or even dissolution of mimetic categories and matrices (*A Mouthful of Birds*, *The Skriker*) when emotion can be replaced by affect. Still, it should be emphasized that, in the earlier plays, before ultimately dismantling the apparatus, Churchill’s plays employ and reveal the working of the theatrical system of representation, making its strategies clearly visible to the audience (especially in *Cloud 9* and *Top Girls*, 1982). It is later, in her densely choreographed *A Mouthful of Birds*—a blend of dance, music and words—that representation is swiftly marginalized, if not entirely eradicated, and where the playwright openly addresses a difficult sub-genre in transit. The process results in a dissolution of rhetorically definable and cognitive emotions. They are supplanted by what can be termed non-cognitive emotion or affect, where the latter is defined as “non-representational” intensity (Vermeulen 8) pertaining, according to McCormack, to a logic remaining beyond the “attention filter of representation” (496).

As opposed to the earlier plays, where representation and subjective cognitive emotion coexist, the sense of borderland experience, with its uncertain emotional geography, dominates both *A Mouthful of Birds* and *The Skriker*. This experience allows for a thin layer of “the old space of representation” (Foucault, *Pipe* 41), a phenomenon Foucault also traces in the surrealist work of René Magritte. Considering analogies, it is not surprising that Churchill brings one of Magritte’s paintings on stage in the final scene of *A Mouthful of Birds*. This visual borrowing suggests that representation has been successfully dismantled and what is left are only its relics which, according to Foucault, linger “at the surface” (*Pipe* 41). Foucault compares this “surface” to “no more than a polished stone, bearing words and shapes,” in fact, “a gravestone.” What Foucault notices in his essay on surrealism, similitude and resemblance is that Magritte buries the strategies of *representation* beneath its illusion. Churchill, on the other hand, strives to either unmake or dissolve them. A denigration of the importance of representational apparatus is central for both the painter and the playwright. Becoming a source of uncanny sensation, the loss of representation matrices triggers what Wolfreys aptly defines as “an ongoing process of coming to terms with one’s being” (18), a hardly tolerable state of mobility and anxiety which generates affect. This intensity, in a ghostly manner, “reascends and impinges upon the painting” (Foucault,

Pipe 41). Hence the sense of mystery: the result is a haunted painting in case of Magritte and a haunted stage in case of Churchill—a cultural text whose once artificial bodies become orificial by opening themselves for something from the past to enter and let itself be felt.⁶ The spectrality invading the verbal space of representation points to a troubled relation with a lost text or a deeply buried “secret” which, for Magritte, is the invisible he compares to the invisibility of pleasure and pain.⁷ In such projects neither images nor words *represent*, a condition Foucault comments on in *The Order of Things* (10).

Foucault and Magritte view language and image production in terms of ghostly *simulacra* sequences. Like Magritte’s paintings, Churchill’s plays are also suffused with anxiety, an experience graspable only if it is linguistically fixed, resulting from and traceable to definite political or economic oppression (for example, in *Vinegar Tom*, 1976). However, the potentially graspable experience (accompanied by codified emotions) undergoes transformations which obliterate the familiar strategies rendering the experience increasingly un-graspable. This in turn generates anxiety surges, an early example of which appears in the closing scene of *Top Girls*, when the sixteen-year-old Angie is suddenly overwhelmed by a haunting sense of horror—a terrifying absence of protection within a familiar matrix. It is a state Marlene, the eponymous character and the girl’s biological mother, tries either to belittle or to rationalize by diagnosing it in terms of the familiar pattern of a bad dream that comes and goes. In cultural and literary terms, the notion of dream offers a long list of interpretative options including, among others, literal and metaphorical indigestion, conventional theatrical intrusion, states of emotional imbalance, return of the *real* or, finally, traumatic mimesis.⁸ Considering the crisis of established value systems *Top Girls* stages, Angie’s condition is more likely to be understood as a state of being seized by affect than a socially or psychologically explicable emotional imbalance. Psychological development of characters is not a priority in *Top Girls*. On the

⁶ Margaret Wetherell distinguishes between affect and emotion by defining the former as “embodied meaning-making” and the latter as disembodied talk and texts (4). Feeling acts (Wetherell 24, 73) as opposed to seeing acts were of interest to the surrealists. Magritte provided a commentary in his *La Race Blanche* (*The White Race*), 1937.

⁷ Letter 1, 23 May 1966. Two letters written by Magritte to Foucault are appended to *This Is Not a Pipe* (57).

⁸ As opposed to the tradition of humanistic tragic narratives, which reconcile the subject with the universe’s moral order via tragic mimesis and where trauma appears as an external and explicable event, traumatic mimesis offers only a temporary suspension of the experience and no reconciliation. Subjectivity, as valuable, is protected by the redemptive work of tragic mimesis which enhances the self-knowledge of both the hero and the viewers (Martin 44).

other hand, Angie's fear can be seen as a case of traumatic mimesis, a condition which precludes explanatory narratives, self-knowledge or epistemologically-charged response to such interpretative endeavours on the part of the audience. It is sheer horror that emanates from the phrase Angie utters, "Frightening" (*Top Girls* 141). The emotional impact of the confession is even more powerful because it lacks the conventional motivation that the Enlightenment and realistic mimesis would guarantee. The affective surge reveals a gap which renders the language of representation dysfunctional. Like Magritte's visual *non sequiturs*, the final scene is heterotopic and disorienting. Angie's intensely experienced fear refuses to be brought into representation⁹—it is non-representational (Pile 7) and non-psychological; it cannot be either grasped or made intelligible. In terms of affect-oriented analysis, the scene reveals what Pile would refer to as "aspects of the subject [traceable] in abject suffering and pain, when the subject has its cloak of subjectivity torn to shreds" (12). Angie's subjectivity is not restored since the chance for a restorative narrative has never been considered. The interpretative rationalizations of why and how the affective intensity emerges in the closing scene turn out ineffective.

Affect, as opposed to the rhetorically definable emotions, resists the terms set by representation matrices. The emanation of affect that the audience may experience in *Top Girls* can be related to traumatic mimesis, to the arrival of the revenant, a disruptive presence which underwrites, as well as interrogates the stories told, in addition, by Marlene's visitors: Pope Joan, Dull Gret, Lady Nijo, Patient Griselda and Isabella Bird (1.1). Marlene overtly incorporates these accounts into the economy of her promotion celebrated in a restaurant—altogether a story of success whose falsehood the closing scene reveals. Addressing the complex historical material of the testimonies—stories once suppressed by patriarchy—Marlene accommodates them in the contemporary narratives of the business and consumer world. In spite of these ordering efforts, *Top Girls* lets the incomprehensible exceed the established ontology and thus forces the audience to recognize the abyssal nature of being and knowing. The strongly affective ending of *Top Girls* invites a reconsideration of the opening celebration and compels the viewers to reflect on what remains invisible and incomprehensible, under the thin layer of the representation Marlene strives to support.

In an effort to define spectrality as "constitutive of the fear that haunts *Dasein*" (Wolfreys 18) and generates affect, Wolfreys brings to-

⁹ A purely political reading of the scene, in the context of the eighties, is more straightforward.

gether Freudian *repression* and Heidegger's *forgetting*. His proposition points to a weakly self-reflective, vaguely cognitive process. In Wolfreys's approach, *being* becomes a permanently haunted location while the haunting process puts into play a "disruptive structure" compelling the subject to an unbearable self-reflective mobility that Terada locates and explores in the story of self-difference.¹⁰ This sense of a tangible disruptive structure becomes crucial in Churchill's *The Skriker* and *A Mouthful of Birds*, where the ancient fairy on the one hand and the Dionysian spirit on the other enter through a theatrical gate whose meaning is hardly definable. It is their fluid mobility that produces a sense of what Anna Gibbs refers to as "an overreaching *movement* which draws what it traverses into active relation" (52). Here mimesis ceases to be a property of either subject or object (as in Terada) and becomes a mode of action, a sequence of transformations, a form of corporeal copying or "mimetic communication" (Gibbs 52) involving a sharing of movement and form in which affect plays a significant role. Affect-oriented theatre seems to move away from resemblance to the Magrittean similitude where conjunctions propel the metamorphic mobility. Representation, Michel Benamou writes, evoking the old strictly ocularcentric concepts, relies on "two vanishing points: God absent in the wings, the King present in his box" (6). In *A Mouthful of Birds*, Male Prison Officer conforms to the transformative mode by giving up the ocularcentric authority: "God makes and destroys. I make and destroy nothing. I do man's work. I transform" (Churchill 25). Male Prison Officer comments on the machinery of discipline but, at the same time, redefines theatre as performance where the spectacle becomes "a succession of intensities rather than symbolic action" (Benamou 6).

Certain modes of expression in particular, for example surrealism and Gothicism, dismantle mimetic discipline to assist the liberation of non-cognitive emotion or affect. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that the Gothic mode liberates feelings¹¹ transcending via its mobility the social patterns of "institutionally approved emotions" (3), i.e. codified emotions. It is a potentiality Wolfreys comments on when referring to the reciprocity of desire and

¹⁰ Terada reflects on the closing of self-difference by classical philosophers, a proposition based on the claim that the process of subjectification has been completed. In realism, she says, self-difference (thinking versus being) is dismissed as chimera (23). Cognitive emotions, as opposed to affect, belong to the Cartesian theatre.

¹¹ Feelings are what Terada calls a "capacious" term, which may connote both affect and emotions (4), but feelings may be defined as a bridging concept, as well, i.e. including body and mind. It is not very clear whether Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to such a common ground or not. From the viewpoint of what the present article assumes, Kosofsky Sedgwick's references involve affect. Benamou uses the term intensity.

interdiction, an interplay which congeals characters in a state he calls “affective tension” (164). Wolfreys notices its effects on character. Churchill’s affiliations with the Gothic as a liberating mode are tangible but have not been really investigated. Among a few cursory observations, Mary Luckhurst notices the Gothic landscapes (4) and the darkly catastrophic atmosphere (5). It does not come as a surprise that more recent theatre reviews and blogs reveal further affinities between Churchill’s “desolate urban world” and China Melville’s “gritty realities” (Croggon). The possibility of bringing affect and the Gothic together is significant since Gothic texts, productions and films have powerful “underlying transgressive potential” (Aldana Reyes 20), rely on non-cognitive reactions (12) and, as a result, threaten the integrity of the artificial bodies by creating an unbearable sense of anxiety (Nelson 3) definable as affect. These eruptions of affect—meaning also the “ability to affect and be affected” (Massumi, “Notes” xvii)—are simultaneously rooted in and bring about the dissolution of representation through endless transformations.

To liberate emotions—not only in her earlier work—Churchill falls back on methods already used by G. B. Shaw, Henrik Ibsen and Bertolt Brecht. One of the inherited methods, facilitating a release of emotion, consists in placing on stage an empirically or a discursively-situated hysterical object, for instance Shaw’s Kitty Warren (in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*¹²). The character is neither a governess, a nurse nor a fallen woman but a former prostitute in the role of a successful businessperson and thus a confusion of imaginable social roles. The discursive oscillation between the decent and the indecent, the feminine and the masculine disturbs the current grammar of representation (analogously in Churchill’s *Cloud 9*) so that Kitty’s textual body becomes a *limit text* disrupting the theatrical contract—an “unpleasant” breach of genre convention resulting in a disintegration of the false accomplishments of subjectification. The hysterical symptoms the unruly body provokes in the audience is a quasi-*catharsis*—a release of violent emotion whose effect is some “knowledge” rather than the expected “truth.” Shaw’s historical comment on the way the audience reacted reveals the anger but also the anxiety caused by the collapse of a socially significant institution:

Mrs Warren’s Profession has been performed at last, after a delay of only eight years; and I have once more shared with Ibsen the triumphant amusement of startling all but the strongest-headed of the London theatre critics clean out of the practice of their profession. No author who

¹² Written in 1893. First production in 1902.

has ever known the exultation of sending the Press into an hysterical tumult of protest, of moral panic, of involuntary and frantic confession of sin, of a horror of conscience in which the power of distinguishing between the work of art on the stage and the real life of the spectator is confused and overwhelmed, will ever care for the stereotyped compliments which every successful farce or melodrama elicits from the newspapers. . . . But dearer still . . . is that sense of the sudden earthquake shock to the foundations of morality which sends a pallid crowd of critics into the street shrieking that the pillars of society are cracking and the ruin of the State is at hand. Even the Ibsen champions of ten years ago remonstrate with me just as the veterans of those brave days remonstrated with them. Mr Grein, the hardy iconoclast who first launched my plays on the stage alongside *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*, exclaimed that I have shattered his ideals. Actually his ideals!¹³ (vii–viii)

On the other hand, telling stories *about* fallen and hysterical women rather than speaking (or acting) from within hysteria, leaves the audience relatively unaffected—e.g., in Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893), a melodrama. The play makes use of characters firmly anchored in a genre which employs predefined cognitive emotions.

In Churchill's *Cloud 9* and *Serious Money* (1987), melodrama and restoration comedy must be defamiliarized as modes and sub-genres subservient to representation matrices in order to enhance the sense of their claustrophobic constrictions symbolized by the Victorian corset, where "a boy's best friend is his mother" (*Cloud 9* 30). In *Serious Money*, a dangerous equivalent of the corset is found in the increasingly virtual operations of the global exchange rendered in the bound language of seventeenth-century couplets and prompted by the intertextual intrusion of Thomas Shadwell's *The Volunteers, or the Stockjobbers* (1692).¹⁴ As a result, the emotional spectrum becomes more problematic. In *Serious Money* genuinely cognitive emotion is ultimately eradicated by the market and reduced to the intensity of sexy greed, a measurable market factor called *demand*:

Starr: "There's ugly greedy and sexy greedy, you dope.
At the moment you're ugly which is no hope.
If you stay ugly, god knows what your fate is.
But sexy greedy *is* the late eighties." (*Serious Money* 287)

¹³ From "The Author's Apology" preceding the 1902 production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1894).

¹⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of Churchill's use of the Shadwell play, see Judith Bailey Slagle (1996: 236ff).

As opposed to the scandal of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, the reception of *Serious Money* was more complex. While insider audiences of stock-brokers and yuppies claimed that the stage show seamlessly blended with their experience, representing it correctly, outsiders were confused by the discovery of a world which affected them but remained entirely incomprehensible.¹⁵ Overwhelmed by the spectacle of financial operations that they were unable to follow, viewers could only sympathize with the conclusion of the character Jake that greed is good (because comprehensible) but that “[f]ear’s a bitch” (*Serious Money* 257). Greed as codified emotion can be translated either into consumer demand or into the well-defined concept of gluttony, a Deadly Sin—hence safely “fixed.” What the audience found difficult was the affective intensity caused by confusion and fear. Among the affects distinguished by Baruch Spinoza and elaborated on by Deleuze/Guattari and Massumi (“Notes”), Nelson selects fear, despair and consternation as useful for contemporary Gothic writing (17) in its production of affective encounters. In *Serious Money* Churchill evokes a sense of mystery to let the audience experience their own vulnerability in the incomprehensible matrix of the modern stock exchange.

In the activist climate of the seventies, Churchill focuses on gender but becomes increasingly interested in the erosion of mimesis and the body as limit-text and site of inquiry. Her policy follows two lines of development. While unveiling and denaturalizing the character-role-actor relations and revealing the political and economic straightjackets, Churchill tells stories *about* oppression, physical exploitation of women and pain, notably in such plays as *Objections to Sex and Violence* (1975), *Owners* (1972), *Fen* (1983), *Vinegar Tom* (1976) and *Softcops* (1984). These issues are present, to some extent only, in the later *Serious Money* and *Top Girls*. Even if, somewhat mechanically, she tries to stretch the logocentric representation by problematizing the homogeneous artificiality of the body. The pleasure of the narrative is retained at least in the earlier plays. The other policy consists in a foregrounding of theatrical illusion and drawing attention to the intricacies of representation in order to question it. This involves various forms of corporeal violence (*Top Girls*, *Cloud 9*) reaching the extreme cases of hurting, hacking, eating bodies, and shape-shifting in the later projects, *A Mouthful of Birds* and *The Skriker*. These attacks on the artificial body liberate intensities that transgress *subjective* emotions—they become nobody’s emotions. In addition to the shocking physical attacks, discursive hysteria assists a further body fragmentation, rendering characters in terms of *assemblage*. This shows also in the alienation of an

¹⁵ On reception, see Stephen Lacey (442).

actor's body from character (in terms of gender; actors taking more roles; actors speaking as actors or as audience). Attention no longer focuses on stories (a change of interest a two-act structure supports, e.g., in *Cloud 9*) but on matrices which regulate representation: while in *Softcops* it is the theatre, in *Cloud 9* it is the subjectification process itself. The character Clive announces the process in the introductory phrase, "as you can see," and Betty confirms admitting, "I am a man's creation as you see" (*Cloud 9* 7). In this way they reveal the governing Cartesian conflation of knowing and seeing. As the basis of representation, knowing and seeing is exploded in subsequent transformations which, in turn, help restore self-difference. The circulation of emotion prevails as a valid source of knowledge over visual access. This explains why Harry's "effeminacy" is not reflected in "signs of degeneration" in his face (*Cloud 9* 33). Ironically, however, the reconciliation of Betty from Act One with Betty from Act Two dismantles self-difference once again and completes subjectification in a melodramatic style, a solution which sponsors artificial bodies and codified emotion.

Churchill struggles to maintain a sense of ambiguity in her deployment of emotion, a policy which rests on oscillation between cognitive emotion, related to representation, on the one hand and the unqualified intensity of affect on the other. Due to this oscillation, Marlene from *Top Girls* can be viewed as a discursively hysterical body probing the monolithic image of the "iron lady" she seems to promote. The interrogation proceeds via the historical and quasi-historical life-stories of the women Marlene summons and tries to "manage" in an effort to control her own image. It is an ambiguity which goes back to Judy Chicago's installation of *The Dinner Party* (1974).¹⁶ In line with the dominant mood, the same stories delivered by the forgotten women can function as ghostly visitations Marlene is unable to master. Hence the eponymous character can be seen as possessed by the fear and anxiety accumulated in the ghostly lives whose disputable success hides traumatic experience. As a result of this spectrum, Marlene's body on stage no longer represents the homogeneity and disciplined artificiality of a successful woman—"the cloak of her subjectivity" is torn to shreds.

The Skriker and *A Mouthful of Birds* are witness to a more radical shift towards Dionysian productions¹⁷ where emotional balance tips violently in favour of non-conceptual emotion/affect. Combining terror and desire,

¹⁶ The background history of Judy Chicago's installation throws more light on the ironic potential of its carnal complexity.

¹⁷ The influence of Hinduism is also traceable in *The Skriker*. For the political uses of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Taoism, see Churchill's drama in Megson (105–06).

these projects launch a violent attack on all the vestiges of representation. The process of dismantling the emphatic formal body in favour of the orificial takes place on several levels commencing with the basic elements of drama. *The Skriker* opens with a long monologue, a verbal act which fails as either a set speech or a prologue. It develops into visceral torrents of words-things, a wasteland inhabited by its speaker, an amorphous body of an old fairy defined by Elaine Aston as the “damaged semiotic” (97). The one-act play unfolds in a series of transformations experienced by the monstrous body, a sequence of mirroring scene-fragments which prevent narratives. Cutting across established institutions, including the theatre, Skriker’s amorphous body transcends socially recognized categories (such as gender), dismantles cultural codifications of genre and character. Skriker is a shape-shifter and death portent (243); a derelict woman (252); an American woman (253); a dowdy patient (251); part of a sofa (260); Lily feel cold (261); a fairy from a Christmas tree (262); a small child (263); a baby (265–66); Fairy Queen (269); Monster (271); a water baby (273); woman in her mid-30s (275); a Man about 30; a Man about 40; an old woman in a hospital (288); Skriker from the beginning (288); Skriker full of energy (299); and Ancient Skriker (290). The incessantly mobile creature travels as an omen of semiotic exhaustion whose fluid condition blurs the borders between the human and the non-human, the animate and the inanimate, undoing in that way the familiar emotional codifications buttressing social institutions, such as the family, which the audience seeks in vain to find on stage. Both the institutions and the audience are left unprotected. Josie, locked up in a mental ward for killing her baby, and the pregnant Lily echo the analogously unprotected condition sensed by Angie and Kit in the earlier *Top Girls*.

In *A Mouthful of Birds* the two-act division renders plotting difficult and reduces the pleasure of potential narratives. The flow of scenes which promises to re-tell the lives of seven Londoners, traditionally identified by social and professional roles (a Switchboard Operator, a Mother, an Acupuncturist, a Vicar, a Businessman, an Unemployed [man], a Secretary), subscribes neither to the matrix of Seven Deadly Sins nor to the topos of seven ages. Underwritten by a three-stage logic of sacrifice,¹⁸ the play’s structure becomes even more complex. Due to this double structuring,

¹⁸ Dancing Dionysos and the scene of skinning the rabbit (*A Mouthful of Birds* 3) open the sacrificial frame whose parts (production, killing and decomposition) could be traced in the project and might signal an attempt to withdraw objects from public/social circulation (Buchli 19). Hauntologically, sacrifice marks a return of the lost knowledge conveyed by Bacchae, at the same time avoiding purely intertextually logocentric indebtedness to the text.

the circulation of socially nameable emotions is weakened. The sacrificial eliminates realistic illusion and invites the inexpressible haunting visitation of the Bacchanalian which, overtly, enters via the pre-text of Euripides' *The Bacchae*. However, more important than the obviously intertextual anchorage in the classic is the dissolution of *stasis* in *dynamis*, an effect enforced by the double, non-overlapping structure. As a result, the narratives are merely announced while instances of transformation (and possession) dominate. Hence, the experience Churchill stages blurs the distinction between subject and object, as well as between objects which remain in a state of continual mobility merging into one another and expanding what *is* as, for instance, in the "Fruit Ballet" (16) or in Paul's relation with the Pig, where the animal treated at first as meat and object of commercial exchange becomes a subject and object of genuine affection—not a parody of quasi-subjectivity resulting from a humanization of animals. The subsequent scenes obliterate boundaries, which cannot be defended. In the gym, Derek is hopelessly involved in the body-shaping process of weightlifting to boost his masculinity but the dialogue informs about the dissolution of criteria for gender differentiation. Permanently unemployed (assuming that masculinity and employment are inseparable), Man 1 no longer imagines working (5). Later, he admits: "My skin used to wrap me up, now it lets the world in. . . . I have almost forgotten the man who possessed this body" (52). The audience is exposed to further puzzling transformations. In response to the Spirit who (like Skriker) becomes a frog, lover, animal, train, bird, roaring animal, Lena also transforms (into a snake, a baby bird, a panther) and transgressing further boundaries begins to eat the Spirit (10–12). Human subjectivity becomes a disputable and uncertain concept. In his essay on the contract between the poet and the myth, referring to Rainer Maria Rilke¹⁹ and Thomas Merton, Wiesław Juszczak argues for

¹⁹ Diamond mentions an analogy between the way Churchill and Lan imagined the "turbulent bodies" of dancing women and quotes from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* (*Elegy 1*) where the poet compares the dancers to birds that "feel the extended air in more fervent flight" (*Unmaking Mimesis* 96). However, she is more interested in the movement and visual effect and the effort to avoid the production of artificial balletic bodies. What Juszczak writes, exploring Rilke's *Elegies* in a broader context, pertains to the nature of perception. And so, in the translation by James Blair Leishman and Stephen Spender, the image of movement is different and becomes an "intimate flight" (Rilke, *The Duino Elegies*). Still another translation (by Alfred Poulin Jr.) from German, where it is "die erweiterte Luft fühlen mit innigerm Flug" (Rilke, *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus* 6), offers: "feel the air thinning as they fly deeper into themselves" (7). In light of the whole collection of elegies, the translations seem complementary and, indeed, only a juxtaposition of the versions conveys the effect of extended liminality and interfusion. Both categories seem vital for *A Mouthful of Birds*.

the need to replace the concept of *homo sapiens* with *homo spiritualis* explaining that the understanding of a boundless reality requires a different perception (57–60). The same pursuits, I would argue, pervade both of Churchill's productions where, as Juszcak proposes, this new perception takes place in the sphere of emotion-intensities. In the boundless alternative world, notably following the death of Pentheus, the voyeur, lack of mimetic protection acquires a different meaning (*A Mouthful of Birds* 50). Protection is no longer needed in a world which has no institutions to defend. On the contrary, extreme happiness and violence blend into moments of "severe physical pleasure" (33) suspending or bursting the need for clear distinctions. This includes the subject/object dichotomy underpinning artificial bodies in the apparatus of representation. The loss of distinctions and boundaries eliminates cognitive emotion and invites affect.

The persistent marginalization of verbal coding undermines the representational apparatus, which, in turn, creates space for non-logocentric forms of expression, such as pain, possession and glamour. In *A Mouthful of Birds*, Marcia, the black medium, standing in opposition to the logocentric white Sybil, refuses to articulate words (scene 13/VI). Not speaking (with the exception of the word "Horror," 52), she uses her *voice* by hyperventilating in order to communicate pre-linguistically. Further on she communicates by emanating pain with her "writhing" convoluted body (18) which becomes a sight of struggle. Daniel Schulze notices that such forms of expression and communication involve "analogous empathy" (115), a form of coding which "speaks to the gut, not to the brain" (124). In the modern dance of her convulsive body (Batiste 222), through pain, Marcia emanates affect rather than cognitive emotion. In the conflict between the white and the black medium, the logocentric Sybil struggles to dominate her opponent by stealing her *voice*. To deprive the black medium of her voice the white medium makes an effort to write down Marcia's hyperventilation as codified music and, in that way, to suppress its emotional expression. Sybil makes an effort to render elements of structure audible and prominent.²⁰ In the phase of post-possession, the black medium withdraws from the human/logocentric world of representation and finds its true "interlocutor" in a speaking "rock." Ultimately, her communication relies on a painfully emotional relationship of her body with the land, which she defines as "longing" (52), a mixture of nostalgia and affect.

The official body becomes central in *A Mouthful of Birds*. The sacrificial process, which opens dramatically with the skinning of the rabbit

²⁰ References to Clifford Curzon, an English pianist who studied at the Royal Academy of Music, reveal the sources of the pertinent juxtaposition of structure vs. emotion.

(a violent opening of the body), followed by scenes where human bodies are also violated and destroyed,²¹ finds its counterpart in Yvonne's transformation. The former acupuncturist redefines her attitude to the body and becomes a butcher. She spends "all day sawing and hacking" to *feel* the strength of her own body better (51) and in that way experiences self-possession. In spite of tempting analogies with scenes 17/I and 17/VII, which reduce body to meat, in the final scene Yvonne (scene 26) is not a compassionless murderer who should be excluded from the Juries of Life and Death.²² Her transformation involves a liberation from the strictures of discipline and the ocularcentric regime, a shift towards *haptic vision* (Deleuze and Guattari 544–45). When feeling replaces seeing, the seminal difference between sleep and wake disappears (Deleuze and Guattari 551). Giving in to carnal desires (non-specific desires; definite addictions including drugs, sex and consumer dependence), the figures rather than characters experience possession by non-cognitive emotion/affect which penetrates the whole spectrum of their transsexual, androgynous, gender-bending, post-human bodies which, finally, enter a stage of liberated *post-possession*. In the experience of possession bodies are decomposed and transformed so that the conventional gender and human boundaries either burst or are extended. The act of possession becomes, paradoxically, a form of escape from the former system of body control. Hence possession becomes as cure (Babagge 118). "The Death of Pentheus"²³ engages the whole company in a dance repeating *moments of extreme happiness and of violence* (*A Mouthful of Birds* 33, 50). This expression of joy, ecstasy and danger takes place through what Stephanie L. Batiste defines as the matrix of kinetic affect whose target is the resistance of "external applications of self and community" (199). Dance in both *The Skriker* and *A Mouthful of Birds* gestures towards an "unscripted subjectivity," making use of the radical possibility in modern dance to speak the "unspeakable" (Arzumova 169) the body can emanate. Dance becomes a constant performance which strives to avoid subjection to the script of representation. Thus, possession, in the case of Lena, Marcia and Yvonne, leads to the recognition of strength that the women sense by re-possessing their bodies.

Ultimately, there is glamour which (like possession) is related to forms of addiction or captivation. Churchill seems to bring together the

²¹ *A Mouthful of Birds* stages and recalls acts of violence, e.g., Doreen slashes Mrs. Blair in the face with a knife (47); Lil reading the paper quotes cases of violence (45); Mother recalls her own experience of domestic violence, provoking at the same time her daughter (42); suicide (37); Woman dies and Dan hauls out her body (26).

²² Colleen Glenny Boggs quotes from John Locke (140).

²³ Part 24 of *A Mouthful of Birds*.

old and the more recent concepts of glamour. More in *The Skriker* than in *A Mouthful of Birds*, glamour functions as the old “fairy enchantment” which ceases to work (Diamond, “Caryl Churchill” 484) or as “outward magic” which masks decay (Meldrum 40). Affect theories, addressing contemporary consumerism, put forward a more comprehensive understanding of glamour which appears to reflect its use in Churchill’s plays. Discussing contemporary glamour, Nigel Thrift emphasizes desire and possession (it is the nineteenth-century conviction that glamour means “deception” and “bewitching beauty”) but defines the concept as a “spell cast by unobtainable realities” (297). To produce captivation, glamour needs an environment in which the human and the non-human are mixed, and the distinctions between alive and non-alive, material and immaterial are blurred (296), generating desire and curiosity. In *The Skriker* and *A Mouthful of Birds*, scenes of pain, possession and captivating glamour take the form of a modern ballet which tries to resist the pressure of semi-otization. Moreover, the fruit ballet in the latter project, putting on stage the human and the non-human, may evoke the threat of the human becoming the non-alive (e.g., by being eaten). In the corporeal performance the play employs, dance choreography is not pictorial but affective.²⁴ As a result, dance withdraws from creating aesthetically-pleasing images. It is affective in its reliance on locating in the body and articulating through the body the basic modes of affect: joy, pleasure and challenge, e.g., in the scene of Paul dancing with the pig (31, 32). Dancing with the non-alive and the non-human involves the “discovery” of movement from within the body—not from a script. This leads to a revalorization of both the pre-symbolic, Juszczak calls *homo spiritualis*, and the body of the hysteric where the latter ceases to be the other.

To conclude, addressing current social and political issues, Churchill’s earlier writings made an effort to transcend the constricting discourses of representation and realism. The pursuit of new forms of expression influenced the playwright’s use of bodies on stage and resulted in a shift from artificially emphatic to orificial bodies. This shift, in turn, enabled the playwright to reconsider the use and importance of emotion(s). By challenging the codified body images, Churchill had to withdraw from fixed emotions anchored in the discourses of representation. These codified emotions have been increasingly perceived as means of buttressing institutions such as the family, the nation and the individual, which contradicted the intentions of a playwright whose aim has been to revise these institutions. Trying to

²⁴ Churchill and Lan seem to follow the logic of modern dance Elizabeth Dempster explores emphasizing its distinctly affective quality (230–31).

eliminate the usage of codified emotions, the playwright commenced with their defamiliarization, e.g., in *Cloud 9*. In *Cloud 9* Churchill articulated institutionalized emotions to enhance the process of self-discovery whose limits the play probed. The process of discovery involved also knowing what one was not. Further transformations involved a shift from cognitive emotion to affect which reached beyond representation. And it is affect that enabled Churchill to stretch (or transgress) the limits of what *is* when in both *The Skriker* and *A Mouthful of Birds* “I am” becomes impersonal (fruit, pig, rock speaking to Marcia). Moving beyond the subject-object duality of emotional circulation, undermining egoic identity, Churchill made space for what had already been present in the theatre, the Beckettian *not I*, for the witnessing awareness.

Affect, if conceived in biological terms, as Massumi propounds (*Parables* 28), resists critique but renders the relation with materiality difficult by claiming its priority: affect dismantles the binarization between the human and the animal. Indeed, in *The Skriker* and *A Mouthful of Birds*, Churchill's drama shifts decisively towards an obliteration of differences between materiality and the immaterial, the living and the non-alive. At the expense of verbal expression and traditional scopic *regime*, the shift invites affect-based dance. Such an inevitable, though puzzling, conflation of word and vision, appears in the closing scene of *A Mouthful of Birds*: it is a shocking juxtaposition of Doreen's “mouth full of birds” and Magritte's 1927 painting, *A Young Girl Eating a Bird* (*The Pleasure*). The scene delivers a powerful emotive charge. More than once, Magritte challenged the representational apparatus, the privilege granted to logocentrism and oculo-centrism. *The White Race* (*La Race Blanche*, 1937) provides an example. Churchill arrives at analogous conclusions rendered in terms of the bird symbolism Magritte also uses. When symbolizing logos, birds penetrate everywhere with true and false meaning representing the spiritual nature of man. As carriers of meaning the birds are humanized and become, like human beings, “code fixers.” In *A Mouthful of Birds*, an excess of language-produced meaning—sponsoring the codes of representation—suffocates the woman with its meaninglessness. On the other hand, the unheard-of songs of the body that Cixous refers to (162) and Churchill implements in her image of Marcia, are found in silence, in “speaking rocks” and the exchange of affective intensities, as well as in the feeling acts. The real value of the birds singing, writes Valérie Baisnée (51), is in the act of singing and not in its meaning. By analogy, the real value of dancing is in performance rather than in the conveyed message (meaning).

Radical inquiries of the representational apparatus grant privilege to orificial bodies enforcing the replacement of the traditional spectrum

of emotion-concepts by affect. Affect, in turn, becomes responsible for a new ontology of the human body that, as Boggs claims, “is constantly open and renewed” (37). Pressed beyond the tradition of sovereign or liberal humanist subjectivity, the audience is asked to accept that subjectivity is not only human. It is the death of a thus defined subject and its humanist frame, seminal for the mimetic legislation, that enables Churchill to put affect on stage.

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Mimesis in Crisis:
Narration and Diegesis in
Contemporary Anglophone
Theatre and Drama

ABSTRACT

The main objective of my article is to investigate the ways in which contemporary Anglophone drama and theatre actively employ diegetic and narrative forms, setting them in conflict with the mimetic action. The mode of telling seems to be at odds with the conviction not only about the mimetic nature of performance and theatre but also about the growing visuality of contemporary theatre. Many contemporary performances and dramatic texts expose the tensions between the reduction of visual representations and the expansion of the narrative space. This space offers various possibilities of exploring the distance between the performers and spectators, tensions between narrative time and place and the present time of performance, the real and the imagined/inauthentic/fake, traumatic memory and imagination. The active foregrounding of the diegetic elements of performance will be exemplified with reference to several contemporary plays and performances: my focus will be on the uses of epic forms in what can be called post-epic theatre, illustrated by Kieran Hurley's *Rantin* (2013); the foregrounding of the diegetic and the undecidability of the fictional and the real, instantiated by Forced Entertainment's performances (*Showtime*, 1996) and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003); and the narrative density and traumatic aporia of *Pornography* (2007) by Simon Stephens.

Keywords: diegesis, mimesis, narration, theatre.

INTRODUCTION

Since traditionally drama is associated with the concept of mimetic action and mimetic speech expressed by individual characters, a tendency to use narrative forms in it often fulfills significant conceptual, imaginative and experimental functions. In contemporary drama and theatre such tendencies have been often associated with the concept of epic theatre or—more recently—with one of the techniques of postdramatic theatre, along with other possibilities. In both cases diegetic forms actively challenge the audience's mimetic expectations either to increase the effect of the critical distance theorized in the concept of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* or to explore a number of effects aiming at increasing the proximity of the performer, in what Lehmann calls “the foregrounding of the personal” (110).

My objective is to look at the ways in which contemporary Anglophone drama and theatre actively employ diegetic and narrative forms, setting them in conflict with the mimetic action. The mode of telling seems to be at odds with the conviction not only about the mimetic nature of performance and theatre but also about the growing visuality of contemporary theatre and the significance of the *opsis* therein. Many contemporary performances expose the tensions between the scarcity or reduction of visual representations and the expansion of the narrative space, often signalled in the deliberate minimalism of stage directions. This space offers various possibilities of exploring the distance between the performers and spectators, tensions between the narrative time and place and the present time of performance, between the real and the imagined/inauthentic/fake, and between memory and imagination.

MIMESIS AND DIEGESIS IN DRAMA AND THEATRE

Mimesis has a number of different definitions and meanings deriving from Plato's and Aristotle's texts. According to Paul Woodruff, the meaning of mimesis cannot be contained in the notions that are commonly associated with the concept, such as imitation, fiction or make-believe: “[m]imesis is the art of arranging one thing to have an effect that properly belongs to another” (qtd. in Shepherd and Wallis 212). This very general definition emphasizes the active part of the viewer in discovering correspondences and analogies. The authors of the *New Critical Idiom* volume devoted to drama, theatre and performance mention two conflicting approaches to mimesis arising from different interpretations of the Aristotelian concept. They put these two perspectives in the following slightly simplified categories: “Both positions are engaged with the effort truly to know what reality is, but the difference between them, put crudely, goes like this: one is concerned to

separate copy from reality, so as to avoid being taken in by illusion; the other wants to use copies as a way of understanding reality better” (Shepherd and Wallis 213). Therefore, the concept of mimesis raises questions concerning the dangers and possibilities of imaginary/false identities and the confusion between illusion and reality. Such considerations were present in the discussion of, for example, sumptuary laws in Elizabethan and later periods, and the dangerous role of gender and class cross-dressing on the stage in the destabilization of social hierarchy and gender identities. The theatrical illusion and imitation was seen as threatening the stability of social relations (Garber 176–77). Above all, mimetic art is said to undermine or steal the authority of the ultimate creator, which Diamond discusses in her introduction to *Unmaking Mimesis*, referring to Plato’s example: “. . . if you were prepared to carry a mirror with you wherever you go. Quickly you will produce the sun and the things of heaven; quickly the earth; quickly yourself; quickly all the animals, plants, contrivances, and every other object we just mentioned” (Plato qtd. in Diamond i). Through mimesis one can create a semblance, a copy which usurps the status of its original by the surface similarity to it. Mimesis would be thus connected to usurpation and creative reproduction. Other considerations related to mimesis, also mentioned by Diamond and primarily employed to discuss the problematic nature of representation of women, include the notions of “good” and “bad” mimesis (the choice of what is worth being represented) and the difference between mimesis seen as imitation, which is selective and creative, and portrayal or copying, which involve all aspects of faithfulness to the original (Diamond iv–v). These are only some of potential areas of discussion inspired by the aspects of mimesis.

In one of many possible approaches, mimesis is contrasted with diegesis, which in theatre involves at least two aspects. They are primarily conditioned by the different ways of understanding the concept of diegesis. Its primary meaning is contained in the act of telling, narrating a story, which is contrasted with the act of showing related to mimesis. In film and also in theatre, diegesis is exposed when the very process of narrating a story is emphasized. This process involves exposing the diegetic techniques used for narrating a story (Pavis 102), in which the very act of narrating is no longer transparent. In postmodern fiction, David Lodge identifies a tendency called “a stream of narration,” associated with the revival of diegesis, which is “foregrounded against mimesis” (195). Referring to Samuel Beckett’s characters, Lodge emphasizes the postmodern narrative compulsion, in which characters have to go on narrating despite sometimes having nothing to say or not being listened to (195). Such aspects of metanarrative stream of narration are also employed in theatre to explore

a number of postmodernist concerns and questions about the limits of imagination, deconstruction of conventions, and the nature of theatrical presence, among other themes.

In some postdramatic performances, according to Lehmann, the stage “becomes the site of a narrative act” (109). This notion of the narrative act emphasizes the significance of the very activity of narrating a story—of being present in front of the audience as a story-teller—outside the story. The narrative presence creates the impression and simulation of authenticity and directness. This would be associated with the presentational theatre as contrasted with representational theatre in many cases (Lehmann 109). Lehmann juxtaposes narration with the fascination with the body and the media (109). Narration seems to stop or suspend the imaginary visual and corporeal presentational aspects of theatre. This effect can be seen as equivalent to some aspects of alienation effect but without aiming at the formation of the critical distance to the theatrical situation. The distance is contained in the very act of imaginary concretization of the story in which a story-teller disappears in or beneath the narrated story. To foreground narration is also to foreground the speaker as a story teller and a human being.

Both forms, the epic and the post-dramatic, are still active in contemporary theatre and drama. The difference in the role of narration in epic and “post-epic” theatres has been described, among others by Lehmann, as the difference between “the closeness within distance” and “the distancing of that which is close” (110). “The closeness within distance” primarily refers to the relation between the listener and the story-teller, which is often intimate and personal in contemporary theatre. “The distancing of the elements” which are close is a way of summarizing the way the alienation effect operates through “turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one’s attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected” (Brecht 107). The result of such a technique is to reduce empathy and emotional involvement which might make critical assessment more difficult to achieve. Some of the techniques of creating the critical distance to the character are using the third person form instead of the first; using the past tense to talk about present actions; reading stage directions aloud; and direct address to the audience (Brecht 101–02). In a sense these measures are employed to reduce the mimetic theatricality of performance and to liken the dramatic form to the diegetic epic structure. The mimetic aspect of speaking in individual voices of the characters, to follow Plato’s distinctions (Lodge 183), is replaced with the attempt to frame the individual voices in the diegetic unifying but critical voice of the narrator.

The active foregrounding of the diegesis can be exemplified by many contemporary theatre performances and dramatic texts. Out of various instances my focus will be on, firstly, the contemporary uses of epic forms in what can be called post-epic theatre, illustrated by Kieran Hurley's *Rantin* (2013); secondly, the foregrounding of the diegetic and the undecidability of the fictional and the real, instantiated by Forced Entertainment's performances (*Showtime*, 1996) and Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* (2003); thirdly, the narrative density and traumatic aporia of *Pornography* (2007) by Simon Stephens. Throughout the part that follows I will be referring mostly to dramatic texts and their performative potential, theatre performances (Forced Entertainment) supported by performance scripts, and occasionally to stage productions of the dramatic texts discussed in this article.

POST-EPIC NARRATIVES IN *RANTIN* BY KIERAN HURLEY

In the contemporary Scottish play *Rantin* by Kieran Hurley, the narrative is foregrounded against the interactive aspects of the ceilidh convention, drawing upon the tradition popularized in theatre by 7:84 company and their *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil* (1973). In fact, the performance text at times relies heavily on McGrath's script, such as in one of introductory passages:

Drew: This is a story that has multiple beginnings, an abundance of middles, and no clear end. It starts, for our purposes, right here under this old railway arch in Glasgow, with each of you here. (Hurley 313)

While being modelled upon the beginning of McGrath's play, which reads "It's a story that has a beginning, a middle, and, as yet, no end" (2), Hurley's introduction exposes the multiplicity and fragmentation of stories as contrasted with an attempt to find a common denominator to the Scottish past, the present and the future in McGrath's play. While stories in Hurley's play are only a part of the stage performance, which includes other forms of entertainment involving the audience, such as songs, music, and jokes, they provide the primary means of both communicating a social and political message and involving the audience in the act of imagination. What the introductory text emphasizes is the dispersal and fragmentation of the contemporary story of Scotland:

Drew explains that what we're offering is a collection of fragments really. We're not trying to show the whole story, that would be impossible.

There's no central character here, just some imagined ideas of different people, with different stories, perspectives, next to each other trying to co-exist. (Hurley 312)

Leaving the stories at the level of narration without visual concretization in stage events and images creates space for further individualization and personalization of stories in the viewers' imagination. The performance text seems to abstain from taking control over the material it presents, leaving it open to individual negotiation and definition.

The first narrative in *Rantin*, describing the rediscovery of Scotland by an American citizen and his trip there: "The fire of the clearances that packed his ancestors off to Canada, their subsequent journey south. Howard thinks about this journey often. He feels it in his bones" (Hurley 314), may represent a classic example of the distancing technique. While the stage directions read "Julia [the actress] *becomes* Howard" (Hurley 313), the actress speaks in the third person "This man is called Howard. He is sixty-seven years old. He clutches his crumpled boarding pass in his hand" (Hurley 313). Despite speaking in the third person and thus creating the narrative distance to the character, the story does not attempt to generate the historical perspective. Quite the contrary, it tries to suggest that each of the stories is happening at this very moment and they are parallel to and simultaneous with one another. The narrative acts make it possible for the stories to build several adjacent dimensions of the present.

Another character, Shona, a fifteen-year-old girl working as a "part-time supermarket check-out worker" (Hurley 334) is introduced as speaking in the first person and enacted by the same actress as Howard. The performer is attributed with a different role and clearly would speak the part of a different person, using a specific register, vocabulary, grammar and melody: "Twenty oors a week ah used tay dae but noo they've goat me doon fur nine" (Hurley 334). This would seem equivalent to the character speaking in its own voice in mimetic rather than diegetic representation in narrative theory. However, while Shona struggles to present her experience and observations, her narrative is interrupted by the third person commentary of another performer, who observes, for example, "She is addressing the people of the town below" or "The people of the Port can't hear her, of course. They're not listening. But she doesn't care. She's used to that" (Hurley 335). Splitting it in between different performers, the play presents a traditional narrative consisting of mimetic representations of the character's words either filtered through the distancing techniques of the third person representation or the narrator's voice that performs the role equivalent to stage directions read aloud.

The play's conclusion transposes all the elements into a metafictional narrative that deconstructs the performance's mimetic and also—in a filmic sense—diegetic functions. The major part of the performance, split into different and fragmentary voices, given only some mimetic autonomy, is followed by a narrative act that tries to gather the loose ends into a framework. The character of Howard, who is still in a plane above the land, provides a distance and perspective from which a pattern could be discerned, but it seems unreadable to him:

Drew: And he doesn't know, that he's part of it already. A story with no single through-line, and no fixed centre. [. . .] And that each of those people in the room are part of the story too. A story that has multiple beginnings, an abundance of middles, and no clear end. (Hurley 353)

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The final part of the performance text suggests translating the narrative act into the performative one, when the narrative describes the character in a story take off his cap and perform “a song which is both an expression of anger, and a song of joy and hope, all at once” (Hurley 354), the meanings contained in the play's title. The diegetic construction of the fictional world and the mimetic imitation of reality by the fictional characters are brought into crisis by transposing the narrative into the real: “And the people will leave and go out into the world. And the story will continue” (Hurley 354). Thus *Rantín* explores the distancing and engaging strategies, which generate a sense of critical awareness of, and participation in, the process of forming the present version of Scottish identity. The diegetic strategies reminiscent of epic theatre are employed paradoxically to increase the sense of the present, simultaneity and provisionality, which tries to bridge history, myth and the present moment.

EXTRA-DIEGETIC NARRATION AND UNDECIDABILITY (*SHOWTIME* AND *THE PILLOWMAN*)

While some writers, such as Lehmann, suggest that “the occasional disruption of the theatrical frame has traditionally been treated as an artistically and conceptually negligible aspect of theatre” before the onset of postdramatic performance (100), there has been quite a long tradition of direct address to the audience realized by a character occupying the extra-diegetic position (in a filmic sense). Lehmann links this extra-diegetic presence to what he calls “the irruption of the real” (100–02). Most aspects of this tendency develop around uncertainty and undecidability about whether the events on the stage are real or not; tensions arise in the risk that is involved

in real situations taking place. The classical example is the scene in Jan Fabre's *The Power of Theatrical Madness*, in which the frogs let loose on the stage are at risk of being trodden upon by the dancing and blindfolded actors (Lehmann 103). In such cases the imitative potential of mimesis is reduced to the moment in which a theatrical situation is confined to its specific self-referential time and space. The real in theatre can be associated with the presentational aspects of performance and contrasted with the representational ones. The presentational elements of performance refer to "a class of transactional (performer-spectator) conventions concerned with *explicit* definition of what is going on," and including the forms of direct address and the play-within-the-play (Elam 81).

Forced Entertainment has been fascinated with various aspects of story-telling on the stage and the breaking of the primary diegetic level. Several productions by the company feature lengthy monologues and confessions directed at the audience as listeners. Some performances, such as *Speak Bitterness* or *A Decade of Forced Entertainment*, are based on the limitation of the mimetic and visual aspect of the performances and the direct reading of texts in front of an audience with no dialogic exchanges between the characters. Narration is also foregrounded in *Tomorrow's Parties*, but many other productions contain several scenes that are based on a confessional narrative exploring the tensions between intimate and public space in theatre. *Showtime* is exceptional in conflating the narrative intimacies on diegetic and extra-diegetic levels. Its major concern is to explore the condition of voyeurism and witnessing in critical fictional events, such as suicide and death, and transposing them onto the level of the real, probing into the audience's reactions to being present in such situations.

Two scenes in particular problematize the relation between diegetic and extra-diegetic audience. The first one presents a man wearing a homemade dynamite bomb tied around his chest, who tries to address the audience and keep them occupied waiting for the performance to start, while the second features a naked man who describes the nightmare experienced often by actors of standing naked in front of an audience with no script yet ready and forced to improvise their part, while somebody else is writing the script. The man with the bomb focuses on the audience's voyeurism and consumerism: "There's a word for people like you, and that word is audience [. . .] An audience likes to sit in the dark and watch other people do it. Well, if you've paid your money—good luck to you" (Forced Entertainment, script 4). The naked man addresses the issues of the private made public in the theatrical situation. The naked body becomes the site of humiliation and extra-diegetic presence. In both cases the performers are placed in very intimate situations and exposed to public view. The au-

dience is put in the position of intradiegetic audience, directly addressed by the characters; however, because of the metatheatrical nature of the narration uttered by the performers, the spectators are engaged in reflecting upon their role in a performance as witnesses. It is in this equivalence between the fictional and the real audience that the diegetic frame of the performance is exposed and the uncertainty about the audience's status is introduced.

While it is almost impossible to feel this uncertainty in terms of real danger and risk of the bomb exploding or to see theatrical nudity as a source of shame, *Showtime* creates a situation that is far from comfortable. The tension arises in the position of the audience in relation to the performer, of a fully dressed group of people gathered for the purposes of passive entertainment and a performer "risking himself" in an act of performance. Whatever the circumstances, the audience's voyeurism is an undeniable fact that exists both within and outside the fictional framework. Therefore, the real—the undecidability of the real—arises in the conflation between the fictional audience, addressed by a performer playing an actor standing in front of an audience and having no proper script apart from metatheatrical commentary, and the real audience, watching a play in which no conventional diegesis (in a filmic sense) is developed. The uncertainty that is a source of discomfort to the audience arises from the inability to assess whether the audience is placed within or outside the diegetic space and thus how they should react to the situation. It seems that the diegetic frame of the performance is strong enough to keep the audience in their seats while being aware of the ethically dubious nature of their position. The presentational conventions are exposed to re-negotiate the type of transaction that spectators enter when they decide to watch and witness a theatrical performance.

A different undecidability is explored through tensions between mimetic and diegetic representation, as, for example, in Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*. Driven by the urgency to know the truth about the murder cases, the characters and spectators are manipulated by the ambiguous status of the stories written and told by the suspect character of Katurian. The impossibility of determining whether the stories are purely fictional and accidentally similar to the represented reality or whether they are part of the art of murder incites a number of questions about the ethics and aesthetics of crime and art. The blurred borders between the fictional reality and the stories-within-the-story are reflected in the theatrical tensions between the purely diegetic narrative and its mimetic on-stage representation. Because of their drastic content, the enactment of the narrated scenes seems to illustrate to the audience how easy it is to follow the mimetic

fallacy and believe in the correspondence between life and art. Despite Katurian's metafictional commentaries on technicalities of writing fiction, the audience can never fully reject either of the possibilities, being caught in a situation described in one of the stories about a child-writer and his tortured and murdered brother. The *mise-en-abyme* structure of the story reveals under one layer another one that hides a corpse symbolically buried together with the story which is too beautiful to be read and preserved:

the corpse of a fourteen-year-old child that had been left to rot in there, barely a bone of which wasn't broken or burned, in whose hand there lay a story, scrawled in blood. And the boy read that story, a story that could only have been written under the most sickening of circumstances, and it was the sweetest, gentlest thing he'd ever come across . . . (McDonagh 34)

The story explaining the origins of art in pain and mystery leads the audience astray by revealing another fictional level that shatters the previous one. The extra-diegetic and metafictional story directs the listeners' attention away from the final turn in the plot: the murder of the parents by the surviving son. Enacting the scenes narrated in the stories exposes the diegetic function of stage actions, its provisional concretizations and premature conclusions.

NARRATIVE OVERABUNDANCE/MIMETIC APORIA IN *PORNOGRAPHY* BY SIMON STEPHENS

The mimetic minimalism of Simon Stephens's *Pornography* and its diegetic density can be linked to a number of significant strategies employed to express the effect of the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London in 2005. Out of these strategies I will focus on the ones that deal with the nature of traumatic experience and the pornographic objectification of the tragic events. What might seem surprising is the minimalism of *opsis* and mimesis in *Pornography*, noticeable also in the performance script and expressed in the scarcity of stage directions. Even the places where playwrights usually put "silence" or "pause" are left blank or with a dash followed by empty space. The only repeated phrase in stage directions, with which the play practically begins and each narrative ends, reads: "*Images of hell./ They are silent*" (Stephens 375). The visual presentation of images of hell provides another blank space, which can be filled with, for example, documentary images of London bombings, as some productions do. However, it seems that the play demands another level of representation, which is more effectively realized in absence or in non-mimetic visual effects, such as, for example, stroboscopic

lights, used in some productions. This conspicuous and symbolically active minimalism raises questions of representation of trauma and the ethics of looking. The primary level on which the play is developed is a series of six narratives delivered by fictional characters living or staying in London in the critical period, followed by a list of real victims who died in the 7/7 bombings, including short and fragmentary biographical information on each of them, except one blank space. While the stage directions suggest that the performance text can be played in a different order from the one given in the script, there is a rationale behind both the order of characters and their reverse numbering. The descending order clearly resembles a countdown, which holds a number of connotations connected with the bomb explosions and with winning the bid to host the Olympic games a day earlier. The seven parts of the performance, according to Aleks Sierz, correspond to the seven ages of man from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, which culminate in the death of the bombings' victims (xvi). While the reference to Shakespeare might seem almost a cliché, its effectiveness derives from the juxtaposition of the natural aging process and the unnatural and unnecessary death.

The first function of the diegetic mode of representation in Stephens's play is concerned with an attempt to address the nature of cultural and social trauma caused by the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London. In "Remembering, Repeating and Working-through," Freud discusses the processes of acting out and working-through as the two stages of the therapy employed in the treatment of the effects of trauma; in acting-out the patient re-enacts events from the past. This stage is always connected with resistance and some form of deterioration in the patient's state resulting from the confrontation with the traumatic memory (Freud 151–52). The second part of the treatment is based on the working-through of resistances in order to disclose their causes (Freud 155). Working-through is seen as a talking cure in trauma therapy and a way of coming to terms with the traumatic past. It is often associated with the concept of diegesis—of telling about the traumatic events and thus mastering the trauma. Acting out is linked to mimesis and is primarily concerned with the repetition of pain. Theatre is an art form particularly suitable to express the traumatic modes of acting out and working through (Wald 99). If we apply these psychoanalytic aspects of mimesis and diegesis, we notice how—through the mimetic reduction and diegetic expansion—the performance deliberately deals with and tries to understand the reasons and effects of the traumatic effects. What is even more important, the aspects of the traumatic events, the feeling of loss, melancholia, anxiety, fear and horror, are retroactively placed in the narratives describing the events happening prior to the accident. This can be partly associated with the belatedness of trauma, but more importantly,

it is a strategy to master the traumatic events by inserting the memory of them in what seems to be an ordinary narrative. The first character numbered Seven, a mother of a young child, locates her imagined holiday trip on the map of countries at war, flying above them in her new sandals:

I'd like to take Lenny [her baby son] on a long-haul flight. I like the screens, the in-flight maps on the backs of the seats in front of you. They allow you to trace the arc of the flight. They allow you to see the size of the world. They allow you to imagine the various war zones that you're flying over. You're flying over war zones. You're flying over Iraq. You're flying over Iran. You're flying over Afghanistan. And Turkmenistan. And Kazakhstan. And Chechnya. On your long-haul flight. On your way out on holiday. With the sandals that you bought with the gold strap and the plastic pink flower. (Stephens 379)

Although this juxtaposition of the triviality of holiday sandals with the gravity of war can be read as criticism of European indifference to violence and suffering outside Europe, in the context of traumatic anachrony, it can reflect the change of perception brought about by the catastrophic event: it is no longer possible to exist without an awareness of the tragic events happening elsewhere. One's holiday trip involves passing over countries afflicted by war within an ironically safe distance but without the ability to forget them.

Similarly, in the narrative Number Six the passage in which the ghost city of London is described reverberates with meanings when viewed from the posttraumatic perspective:

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-
The whole city's haunted. Every street there's something disused. There are forty tube stations, closed for fifty years. There are hundreds of pubs. There are hundreds of public toilets. The railway tracks. The canal system. The street map is a web of contradiction and complication and between each one there's a ghost.
-
People disappear here in ways they don't in other cities. People get buried in rooms. They get walled up in cellars. They're dug under the gardens. All of these things happen. (Stephens 396)

The haunted city, inhabited by ghosts and plagued with buried corpses, is an effective metaphorical description of the post-catastrophic city. The feelings of loss and mourning are discussed in another seemingly detached comment: "But the thought of their lost one, of their child or their lover or

their colleague, hits them like a train. And their voices catch in their throats and they can't carry on" (Stephens 393). While referring to an incident from before the tragic events, the excerpt expresses the inexpressible quality of the traumatic experience. The same ghostly London is seen by the character of the terrorist, while one character in part three comments on the bruises and scars, which metaphorically might refer to trauma's association with the wound: "These things, they're not bruises. They don't fade. They're scars" (Stephens 428). The character in the sixth narrative (Two) gathers the fragmentary expressions of trauma in a passage describing her inexplicable crying: "I walk home. The chicken tastes good. I let myself in. I can't feel my feet any more. I can't understand why there are tears pouring down the sides of my face. This makes absolutely no sense to me at all" (Stephens 436). The diegetic description of the characters' lives contains gaps and aporias, as well as indirect references in which the traumatic event is contained. The characters seem to be struggling to find a proper language to express their experience, coming to terms with what they cannot name, stopping at the critical moment that is not articulated. The trauma is contained in what is silenced and inexplicable in the diegetic description.

The second aspect of diegesis concerning the deliberate decision to abstain from the graphic depiction of the traumatic experience of the attacks is related to the play's title and expresses a critical commentary on the mediatization of terrorism and human drama. By containing the experience in fragmentary narratives and occasional disrupted conversations with the blank lines and empty spaces, the play attempts to find a language that would be free from the sensationalism and trivialization of the mass media reports, their fascination with images (journalistic photography, mobile phone pictures, security camera footage) and their objectifying properties. In this respect the title subverts not only the possible expectations of the play's theme but uses the strategies that are contrary to pornographic exposure. The narratives create the intimate space and closeness in which the elements of the traumatic experience are smuggled in between other aspects of everyday life or contained in blank spaces. The play uses the strategies that prevent a possibility of seeing others as objects, avoiding the voyeurism and scopophilia characteristic not only of pornography but of other visual representations, employed, among others, in the mass media (cf. Mulvey 449–50).

CONCLUSION

The variety of uses and abuses of diegesis in contemporary theatre and drama rely for their effect on the active reduction or downplaying of mimesis. Diegesis is foregrounded against the deliberate decision to minimize the

optical and mimetic aspects of performance. In metatheatrical plays and performances exploring the nature of theatre, diegesis is exposed within extradiegetic frames, in which one narrative is built upon another only to reveal that there is still another diegetic level in the story. Such dramatic plays and performances usually investigate the aspects of theatrical presence, presentational theatre, the tensions between private and public space, as well as the ethics of watching. Diegetic forms are also significant strategies in generating the alienation effect and the critical distance to events and characters in what could be called post-epic performance. Diegetic presentation in theatre also replaces mimesis where provisional, fragmentary and incomplete identities need to be expressed. Narrated realities are easily modifiable, adjustable and dynamic, but generate a sense of instability and uncertainty. One of the crucial functions of diegesis is to replace mimesis in the moments of crisis, when the available means of straightforward representation fail. Narratives built around the aporetic centre of an accident offer ways of dealing with traumatic memories, simultaneously showing the impossibility of adequately responding to reality.

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**Negotiating Reality: Sam Shepard's
States of Shock, or "A Vaudeville Nightmare"**

ABSTRACT

In the course of a career that spans half a century, from the Vietnam era to the America of Barack Obama, Sam Shepard has often been labelled as a “quintessentially American” playwright. According to Leslie Wade, “[d]rawing from the disparate image banks of rock and roll, detective fiction, B-movies, and Wild West adventure shows,” Shepard’s texts “function as a storehouse of images, icons, and idioms that denote American culture and an American sensibility” (*Sam Shepard* 2). The article addresses Shepard’s work in the 1990s, when—as suggested by Stephen J. Bottoms—the writer’s prime concern was with depicting “a Faustian nation mired in depravity and corruption” (245). The discussion centres primarily upon a brief anti-war play first presented by the American Place Theatre in New York City on 30 April 1991, *States of Shock*, whose very title appears to sum up much of the dramatist’s writing to date, aptly describing the disturbing atmospheres generated by his works and the sense of disorientation frequently experienced by both Shepard’s characters and his audiences. The essay seeks to provide an insight into this unsettling one-act play premiered in the wake of the US engagement in the First Gulf War and deploying extravagant, grotesque theatricality to convey a sense of horror and revulsion at American military arrogance and moral myopia. It investigates how Shepard’s haunting text—subtitled “a vaudeville nightmare” and focusing on a confrontation between a peculiar male duo: an ethically crippled, jingoistic Colonel and a wheelchair-using war veteran named Stubbs—revisits familiar Shepard territory, as well as branching out in new directions. It demonstrates how the playwright interrogates American culture and American identity, especially American masculinity, both reviewing the country’s unsavory past and commenting on its complicit present. Special emphasis in the discussion is placed on Shepard’s preoccupation with the aesthetics of performance and the visual elements of his theatre. The essay addresses the artist’s experimental approach, reflecting upon his creative deployment of dramatic conventions and deliberate deconstruction of American realism.

Keywords: Sam Shepard, *States of Shock*, Persian Gulf War, Vietnam War, Georges Bataille.

Sam Shepard made his debut as a playwright in 1964 Off-Off-Broadway, at the Theatre Genesis, where his experimental, disruptive one-act pieces *Cowboys* and *The Rock Garden* were performed. Since then, he has seen his work staged both off and on Broadway, as well as in all the major American regional theatres. In the course of a career that spans half a century, from the Vietnam era to the America of Barack Obama, Shepard has evolved from alternative theatre to mainstream recognition and Hollywood, from being a counterculture rebel to being a cultural icon, earning both critical esteem and media attention. During those five decades of writing, he has often been labelled “quintessentially American,” and even, rather controversially, the “most American” of America’s dramatists (qtd. in Wade, *Sam Shepard* 2). According to Leslie Wade, “[d]rawing from the disparate image banks of rock and roll, detective fiction, B-movies, and Wild West adventure shows,” Shepard’s texts “function as a storehouse of images, icons, and idioms that denote American culture and an American sensibility.” “If nothing else,” the cultural critic further suggests, they serve as “a theatrical Smithsonian” (*Sam Shepard* 2). While this assessment of the artist’s standing may sometimes appear somewhat exaggerated, there can be no doubt that his works, or decades of his works, have found resonance with American audiences. Importantly, Shepard’s inclusive writings defy an easy classification. Clearly partial to “a postmodern aesthetic” (Roudané 1), the dramatist has shunned realist psychology and favoured playful eclecticism. Drawing upon and juxtaposing a diverse range of (often non-literary) sources, genres and styles—from popular music and visual arts, through crime stories, gothic fiction and science fiction, to Greek tragedy and Beckettian absurd—he has teased his audiences with very theatrical pastiches of myth and actuality, consistently eluding totalizing exegeses.

The article addresses Shepard’s theatre at the outset of the 1990s, the decade when the acclaimed, award-winning playwright-director-movie-star manifestly continued to evolve and reinvent himself. He experimented with both structure and content exploring new paths, redeploying earlier techniques and branching out in novel directions in an attempt to challenge both himself and his audiences (Bottoms 243). Stephen J. Bottoms begins his comprehensive study of the dramatist’s work, *The Theater of Sam Shepard: States of Crisis*, with an intriguing postulation that the title of Shepard’s play premiered at the opening of the 1990s, *States of Shock*, if not the play itself, almost sums up the author’s entire output, offering “an apt description for the arresting, disturbing atmospheres which Shepard’s plays so often create onstage” and for the sense of disorientation frequently experienced by their characters, as well as theatregoers (1). He argues, quite rightly it seems:

The tensions and contradictions generated by Shepard's writing—whether overt or, in much of his late work, more covert—tend to disrupt any possibility of the theatrical event's being experienced smoothly, and so throw up all kinds of unresolved questions. Although Shepard's work has gone through many phases since he first began writing for Off-Off-Broadway venues in 1964, this instability has been a distinguishing feature throughout. (Bottoms 1)

The essay seeks to provide an insight into *States of Shock*, which ushers in the decade in which Shepard's overriding preoccupation seemed to be with, as posited by Bottoms, "depicting a Faustian nation mired in depravity and corruption" (244–45). The play was first presented by The American Place Theatre in New York City on 30 April 1991—that is, in the wake of the US engagement in the First Gulf War. In this brief one-act, Shepard resorted to extravagant, grotesque theatricality to convey a sense of horror and revulsion at American military arrogance and moral myopia. It should be noted, perhaps, that *States of Shock*, produced for only a short run, was not a resounding success; in fact, it met with a backlash from reviewers, and some of the concerns and objections voiced by its critics seem, at least in part, legitimate. There is, as Bottoms has observed, "an awkwardness" about this topical, impassioned play that is not entirely disguised by Shepard's linguistic and theatrical originality; "in aiming simultaneously for stylistic fragmentation and thematic focus, [the dramatist] does not quite achieve either" (244). Many reviewers, ostensibly surprised by Shepard's unprecedented commitment, deplored the play's "heavy-handedness, propagandistic intent, laden symbols, and 'oped declamations'" (Wade, "*States of Shock*" 264).¹ Yet, the haunting text, subtitled "A Vaudeville Nightmare," stirs up curiosity and merits consideration, in particular when it comes to the way in which it interrogates American culture and American identity, especially American masculinity, by both reviewing the country's unsavory past and confronting its complicit present. The article deals with Shepard's bid to expose and explore the nation's self-consuming, destructive tendencies and crippling aberrations, looking at questions of conflict, virility, aggression, retribution and empathy, as well as tackling the economies of domination derived from Western codes of manhood. Special attention in the discussion is paid to Shepard's preoccupation with the aesthetics of performance and the visual elements of his theatre. The essay addresses the artist's stylistics,

¹ For a concise overview of the diverse criticism on *States of Shock*, see Wade, "*States of Shock*" (264–65). For Shepard's response to the largely negative reception of the play in 1991, see Shepard, "Silent Tongues" (236).

reflecting upon his creative manipulation of dramatic conventions and his deliberate deconstruction of American realism.

It has been uncommon to think of Sam Shepard as a political writer, even though the roots of his career can be traced back to the early ferment of the Off-Off-Broadway movement and the Greenwich Village counterculture of the 1960s that generally contested establishment values and embraced transgressive art by posing a challenge to authority. The veteran American playwright and a self-declared non-partisan has generally avoided being drawn into political disputes, unlike, for instance, his renowned peer, David Mamet.² However, when *States of Shock* was produced in the spring of 1991, only three months after President George Bush had declared a cease-fire ending the Persian Gulf War, it was difficult not to interpret it as the dramatist's appalled response to the excessive displays of patriotic zeal and national elation following the overwhelming victory of the US-led coalition's military offensive in the Gulf and the monumental destruction of the Iraqi forces. Shepard with this play clearly went against the grain, boldly opposing the general national mood at that specific moment in time. Although the staging was expressionistic rather than realistic and the time of action unspecified, one could easily point to several aspects of the play that linked its plot to the conflict in the Persian Gulf. For example, the memory of the round-the-clock media coverage showing the sustained aerial bombardment of Baghdad, part of Operation Desert Storm, was evoked by Shepard's deployment of a cyclorama which covered the entire wall upstage and was, every now and then, "*lit up with projections of tracer fire, rockets and explosions in the night*" (Shepard, *States of Shock* 5). Such images of technological warfare effectively alluded to the realities of the Gulf War, or, in the words of Bruce Cumings, America's first "television war": "not blood and guts spilled in living color on the living room rug, not the transparent, objective immediacy of the all-seeing eye, . . . but a radically distant, technically controlled, eminently 'cool' postmodern optic which, in the doing, became an instrument of the war itself" (103). Cumings elaborates further:

The advance of American technology allowed us to sit in our living rooms and watch missiles homing onto their Baghdad targets, relayed via nosecone cameras that had the good taste to cease transmitting just as they obliterated their quarry, thus vetting a cool, bloodless war through a cool medium. (122)

² For a sample of David Mamet's strong views on the key political and cultural issues of our times, see his famous *Village Voice* article "Why I Am No Longer a 'Brain-Dead Liberal'" and, more recently, his 2012 book *The Secret Knowledge: On the Dismantling of American Culture*.

To add to the effect on the audience, the war panorama in Shepard's play was accompanied by the drumming of two live percussionists situated behind the cyclorama whose driving rhythms gradually built in intensity as the cyclorama took on "an ominous tone" (Shepard, *States of Shock* 5).

States of Shock discards a meticulously detailed box-set simulating a real-world setting in favour of a minimalist stage set. Shepard locates the action in a "family restaurant," of which we are reminded several times in the course of the play, but it is more like "the dreamscape" of a diner (DeRose 136), consisting of very few, isolated properties: a simple café table with two chairs and a red Naugahyde café booth arranged on a bare stage in front of the cyclorama. The establishment is populated by an inept waitress, Glory Bee, who patently struggles to balance trays full of dishes and drinks, and two apathetic customers, the White Man and the White Woman:

The WHITE MAN sits slumped in his chair with his chin on his chest and his hands folded in his lap. . . . He is not asleep but appears to be in a deep state of catharsis. Very still. The WHITE WOMAN, sitting opposite him at the table, is more upright but equally still, staring off into up-stage space. . . . They are both dressed completely in white, very expensive outfits, reminiscent of West Palm Beach. . . . Their faces and hands are also white and pallid, like cadavers. (Shepard, *States of Shock* 5)

These two stock bourgeois figures function as "cadaverous embodiments of mainstream consumer consciousness," as Wade defines them ("*States of Shock*" 263). Indeed, detached and mostly inert, they arrogantly voice their dissatisfaction with the restaurant's inadequate customer service and their long-delayed orders:

WHITE WOMAN: My husband and I have been waiting three quarters of an hour for a simple order. . . . Two bowls of clam chowder. You'd think that would be simple enough. . . . I mean it's not as though we ordered a club sandwich or a turkey dinner with a lot of trimmings. . . . We have better things to do this morning. . . . We could have had most of our shopping done by now. We could be buying things as we speak. (Shepard, *States of Shock* 8–11)

The waitress, the White Man asserts, "ought to be fired" (9) or, as far as his wife is concerned, "shot" (17). As Emma Creedon has observed with respect to the characters' verbal exchanges recycling the vocabulary of war, "the levels of representation [in *States of Shock*] operate on mimetic, diegetic, filmic, but also textual planes as the language of warfare

is assimilated into the text" (141). As the play unravels, it becomes clear that a bitter military conflict rages outside but, oddly enough, the white American couple nonchalantly disregard both the screened clips of the war footage and the explosions of the deafening percussive assault. Undisputedly, Shepard's vision of middle America's blinkered self-involvement and smug acceptance of the violence being enacted on its behalf was bound to unsettle the viewers in the 1990s (Bottoms 245).

Interestingly, while *States of Shock* apparently meant to address, if not puncture, the post-Gulf War euphoria of national unity and shed light on the callous neglect of the American public for unrestrained destruction of the lopsided conflict in Iraq, the play was also disparaged for offering a rather dated, post-Vietnam perspective. Such objections were motivated chiefly by Shepard's portrayal of the bizarre male duo dominating the stage, consisting of the Colonel and Stubbs. The character of the belligerent Colonel sports a peculiar ensemble of uniforms and paraphernalia from America's military history which, as we learn from the stage directions, "have no apparent rhyme or reason": "an air force captain's khaki hat from WWII, a marine sergeant's coat with various medals and pins dangling from the chest and shoulders, knickers with leather leggings below the knees, and a Civil War saber hanging from his waist" (Shepard, *States of Shock* 5). Thus, the figure of the Colonel could stand for any colonel, as his assorted costume appears to imply. As an "archetypal military man" (DeRose 134), he adheres to jingoistic "principles" and "codes," and expatiates upon "American virtue" and the bravery of national heroes generated from the pioneer stock (Shepard, *States of Shock* 27, 24). In the name of the nation, he vindicates historical mayhem and destruction, arguing for the necessity of aggression: "Aggression is the only answer. A man needs a good hobby. Something he can sink his teeth into" (39). The dramatist himself stressed the timelessness of the character, originally played by John Malkovich: "I wanted to create a character of such outrageous, repulsive, military, fascist demonism that the audience would recognize it. . . . [a] monster fascist" ("Silent Tongues" 236). As the play opens, the Colonel is pushing a young man in a wheelchair with "small American flags, raccoon tails, and various talismans and good-luck charms flapping and dangling from the back of the seat and armrests. . . . He is covered from the waist to the ankles with an old army blanket" (Shepard, *States of Shock* 5–6). The presentation of Stubbs—whose very name suggests mutilation—as an incapacitated war combatant relates the character in an indelible manner to the images of Vietnam War veterans circulating in popular culture. Stubbs periodically blows a silver whistle hanging around his neck and "abruptly lifts his shirt to the armpits, revealing a massive red scar in the centre of his chest" (7). He

“[t]ook a direct hit from a ninety millimeter,” the Colonel publicly explicates. “Went straight through him. . . . It’s a wonder he’s still with us” (7). The Colonel announces that he has brought his companion to this family diner for some dessert to celebrate the anniversary of his son’s death in combat. The son—whom Stubbs heroically, if unsuccessfully, tried to shield from an incoming enemy missile—was shot dead, while Stubbs, who miraculously survived, is allegedly “the lucky one” (7).³

In their illuminating essay “Shamanism Vilified and Redeemed,” Alfred Nordmann and Hartmut Wickert, responsible for staging the German premiere of *States of Shock* in 1993, argue for the universality of Shepard’s “vaudeville nightmare” suspended between two wars, the Persian Gulf War and the Vietnam War, suggesting that “the experience of Vietnam,” as well as the “countless plays and movies about the Vietnam experience” lie behind the drama’s two male protagonists (42). They postulate, among other things, that Shepard’s works, including *States of Shock*, are intelligible not only to Americans but also to audiences across borders as they refer to “a celluloid landscape” that is generally recognizable, and thus “we relate to the Colonel as to Marlon Brando in *Apocalypse Now*, to Stubbs as to Tom Cruise in *Born on the Fourth of July*, we see involvement of a father-image as in *Platoon*, and the rituals of remembering as perhaps in *The Deer Hunter* or *Taxi Driver*” (44). Given that those iconic movies have insinuated the Vietnam War into our—not only American but also European—past, Nordmann and Wickert continue, that “since their imagery resonates on many levels with *States of Shock*, they clearly facilitate an understanding of the code to which Shepard alludes, which he cites and undermines, with which he plays” (44). Importantly, as the authors of the essay insist, *States of Shock* must clearly be seen as much more than merely “a digest or summation or condensation of the movie-imagery of one and perhaps all wars” (44).⁴

³ Whereas the play’s political dimension, or dimensions, have been widely acknowledged, it also needs to be emphasized that *States of Shock* could equally be related to Samuel Beckett’s aesthetics and theories of representation, and seen, for instance, as a variation on *Endgame*. The main male character pairing (the master-servant/surrogate father-son pairing), the Colonel and Stubbs, could be read as Shepard’s versions of Hamm and Clov trapped in the midst of some obscure apocalypse, while the inert white couple clearly evoke Beckettian Nagg and Nell.

⁴ Nordmann and Wickert point out that if one views Shepard’s drama exclusively through the eyes of a movie-goer, it is easy to forget that *States of Shock* also corresponds to the Gulf War, a war of different dimensions and defined by different imagery than the war in Vietnam. They argue: “Shepard’s play leaves extant movies and plays about Vietnam far behind in that it shows how the archaic imagery of the Vietnam war can be mobilized for a technologically disembodied Gulf War which turns every television set into a remote control monitor from which the air strikes appear to be conducted” (44).

Similarly to Vietnam War veteran Ron Kovic, the wheelchair-using protagonist of Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July*, released three years before *States of Shock*, Stubbs in Shepard's play also returns from combat duty physically and spiritually impaired, serving as an unpalatable "image of inglorious war and its brutal aftermath, known to Shepard's generation—the Vietnam generation," but carefully censored from the Persian Gulf War coverage (DeRose 135). Like Kovic, played by Tom Cruise, Stubbs too is evidently embittered by public indifference to victimization and its attempts to overlook his version of events. However, in contrast to Stone's more melodramatic approach, Shepard opts for an ensemble of overdrawn types and grotesque comedy, resorting to extravagant stage effects. His maimed protagonist disorients everyone with piercing blasts on his whistle and neurotically reverts to the day when he was hit, exposing the gaping red wound in his chest. He thus creates a spectacle which is discomforting and humorous at the same time (Bottoms 246). Moreover, several times during the play, Stubbs ostentatiously refers to his sexual impotence, looking down at his lap and dwelling on his "thing" that "just hangs there" "like dead meat":

STUBBS (to GLORY BEE): When I was hit I could no longer get my "thing" up. It just hangs there now. Like dead meat. Like road kill. (*Short pause. GLORY BEE stares at STUBBS, then pulls away.*)

GLORY BEE: Two banana splits. With candles. . . . (STUBBS blows his whistle, then suddenly screams at GLORY BEE.)

STUBBS: MY THING HANGS LIKE DEAD MEAT!!! (*Pause. White couple turns and stares at STUBBS. The COLONEL ignores them. He's busy taking several toy soldiers, tanks, airplanes, and ships out of his bag and arranging them on the table in front of him. STUBBS just stares into space.*) (Shepard, *States of Shock* 12)

Significantly, the young veteran's words and actions are regarded with disdain by the white couple, who consistently refuse to be bothered by his traumatic war memories, mutilation and pain. It could be argued that the sense of alienation, betrayal and abandonment by his own country, that torments Stubbs, pertains more to the experience of Vietnam than to the generally supported and successful military campaign against Saddam Hussein at the outset of the 1990s, which was engineered to "kick the Vietnam syndrome" and avoid the stigma attached to returning Vietnam War veterans (Crane xv–xvi). On one level, Stubbs in *States of Shock*, debilitated and dependent on drugs, clearly represents "the shattered, post-Vietnam realities of young men killed and traumatized in a costly and paranoid war of expansionism" (DeRose 136). However, it is also worth noting that Shepard draws upon and satirizes the antiseptic rhetoric of Gulf War

coverage to clarify the origin of Stubbs's wounds. "It was friendly fire that took us out," the man reveals, that is, he was shelled by artillery fire from his own forces. "It was friendly fire. It smiled in my face. I could see its teeth when it hit us. I could see its tongue" (Shepard, *States of Shock* 31). Thus, the young combatant's growing resentment in the play stems not only from the fact that his suffering has been blithely dismissed by a nation nonchalant about the physical and emotional casualties of its government's hawkish policies, but also from the fact that he has been sent to the fray and mutilated by his own people:

STUBBS: The part I remember—The part that's coming back—is this.
 (To COLONEL, on his knees.) Your face. Your face leaning over my face.
 Peering down. . . . Your face, lying. Smiling and lying. Your bald face of
 denial. Peering down from a distance. Bombing me. (43)

The confrontation between these two male figures—enacted before symbolic representatives of the American public—drives the play's main tension. The Colonel, "a cheerleader for aggression" (Rich), insists on replicating the scenario of the victorious campaign against a vicious enemy in which he lost his son; he relentlessly questions Stubbs as to the details of the horrific experience and reconstructs the circumstances of the operation with miniature toy soldiers. He is manifestly enraged by Stubbs's continued claims that he is, in fact, the Colonel's disinherited son, incapacitated by his own troops as he was running from battle. The Colonel fervently denies the blood relation and, as the play develops, his frenzy escalates into physical violence, laying bare his inability to come to terms with the young man's impotent, disabled condition: "No son of mine has a 'thing' like that. It is not possible" (Shepard, *States of Shock* 34), and, more importantly, with the questionable nature of militarism and its gloomy legacies. Stubbs openly ridicules the Colonel's desperate attempts to overcome disorientation and reinforce his crumbling self-assurance about the glorious myths of war which he so devoutly preaches: "Hold on to an image! Lock onto a picture of a glorious, unending expansion! DON'T LET YOURSELF SLIP INTO DOUBT!" (38).

Emma Creedon, who has applied a surrealist lens to the dramatist's work of the 1990s, has analyzed *States of Shock* in terms of Georges Bataille's theory of "nonproductive expenditure," as a "performance of waste" (134–61). She argues that the brief yet multi-layered drama rendering Shepard's critique of war-mongering and deadening consumerism successfully extends his artistic vision "from the microcosm of the family," which was Shepard's focus for much of the 1980s, as evident in *Fool*

for *Love* (1983) and *A Lie of the Mind* (1985), “to the macrocosm of the American psyche at large in an explicit rendering of United States military methods” (138, 135). Importantly, in this reflection upon the macrocosm of the nation, the dramatist manifestly aims far beyond exposing his country’s military hubris in the 1990s: the “cult of the self” (Creedon 136), expansionist machismo, and the “us-versus-them” scenario extolled by Shepard’s demonic Colonel which appears to be symptomatic of a more serious, and durable, American affliction crippling its citizens. What Shepard effectively does here, as suggested by Bottoms, is supply a provocative variation on the theme of “defining one’s own identity in dualistic opposition to some supposed ‘other’” (247) which features strongly in his earlier writings—notably, his celebrated family drama *True West* (1980). It is posited, rather alarmingly, that “the nation’s self-perception depends on having an opponent to demonize” (Bottoms 247). At one point in the play, both men even raise their cups in salute and drink to the enemy, while the Colonel repeatedly exclaims his appreciation of an unnamed foe whose evil united the country in revenge:

COLONEL: You have to remember that the enemy is always sneaking. Always slimy. Lurking. Ready to snatch the slightest secret. The smallest slipup. . . . Let’s have a toast. (*They click cups and drink together.*) TO THE ENEMY! . . . WITHOUT THE ENEMY WE’RE NOTHING!
 STUBBS (*toasting*): WITHOUT THE ENEMY WE’RE NOTHING!
 COLONEL: Exactly! Where would we be today without the enemy?
 STUBBS: I don’t know . . . where would we be?
 COLONEL: THE ENEMY HAS BROUGHT US TOGETHER!
 (Shepard, *States of Shock* 14–15)

Nordmann and Wickert acknowledge that, largely due to the play’s temporal and historical ambiguity, Shepard essentially invokes here “all wars at all times”; perhaps this one-act “deals with the state of war as a state of being,” they suggest, “perhaps with a permanent and pervasive disposition towards warfare on all levels of interaction, perhaps with war as the ‘father of all things’ which patterns all modes of production in modern industrial societies” (44–45). On the other hand, it could also be argued that the need for an external foe, underscored in the above passage from the play, made *States of Shock* particularly relevant to the 1990s. Military conflicts, as the Colonel insists, are not only useful but indispensable, for they offer a purpose, a stable point of reference to guard people against uncertainty. In view of the collapse of the Communist bloc and the dissolution of the Soviet Union that idea seemed to gain new validity. As the waitress in Shepard’s

play remarks: “I missed the Cold War with all my heart” (Shepard, *States of Shock* 41), thus exemplifying the disorientation brought about by the new realignment of global politics at “the dawn of a new world order” (Allison vii) and the disappearance of a distant “evil empire” against which to construct the country’s self-image. Seen from this perspective, the invasion and occupation of Kuwait launched in 1990 by Saddam Hussein, “a much less capable Soviet surrogate” (Crane xv), appeared to provide a convenient, black-and-white, “us-versus-them” scenario, setting off an immense military retribution by the coalition of allied forces which did much more than merely realize “the Wilsonian ideal of nations acting collectively to right the wrongs of an evil transgressor” (Allison vii).⁵

When interviewed by Carol Rosen in August 1991 about the genesis of *States of Shock*, Shepard recalled watching TV in a Kentucky horsemen’s bar and feeling outrage at the disturbing images of the Gulf War displayed on the screen and the wild enthusiasm that the spectacle provoked:

It just seemed like doomsday to me. I could not believe the systematic kind of insensitivity of it. That there was this punitive attitude—we’re just going to knock these people off the face of the earth. . . . Not only that, but they’ve convinced the American public that this was a good deed, that this was in fact a heroic fucking war, and welcome the heroes back. What fucking heroes, man? I mean, they bombed the shit out of these people. They knocked the stew out of them over there with bombing and bombing and bombing. The notion of this being a heroic event is just outrageous. . . . I can’t believe that, having come out of the ’60s and the incredible reaction to Vietnam, that voice has all but disappeared. Vanished. There’s no voice any more. This is supposed to be what America’s about? (“Silent Tongues” 235)

The intense outrage and horror triggered by “the whole hoax” of the war and the way everything became “choked down and censored in the media” was, as Shepard later clarifies, what ultimately prompted him to write (“Silent Tongues” 236). *States of Shock* gives vent to a feeling of indignation. It offers a parody of the nation’s fixation with endorsing ideals of virile, heroic and violent masculinity, whilst also harking back to the Western codes of manhood which are seen as an antidote to a sense of crisis and lack of purpose “in the grand scheme of things” (Shepard, *States of Shock* 33). As the Colonel emphatically asserts:

Even in the midst of the most horrible devastation. Under the most terrible kind of duress. Torture. Barbarism of all sorts. Starvation. Chemi-

⁵ See also Crane.

cal warfare. Public hangings. Mutilation of children. Raping of mothers. Raping of daughters. Raping of brothers and fathers. Execution of entire families. Entire generations of families. Amputation of private organs. Decapitation. Disembowelment. Dismemberment. Disinturnment. Eradication of wildlife. You name it. We can't forget that we were generated from the bravest stock. The Pioneer. The Mountain Man. The Plainsman. The Texas Ranger. The Lone Ranger. . . . These have not died in vain. These ones have not left us to wallow in various states of insanity and self-abuse. We have a legacy to continue, Stubbs. (24)

One of the implications of the Colonel's speech is that aggressive expansionism is "America's manifest right," even an obligation, since it constitutes "the logical extension of these frontier traditions" (Bottoms 247). Interestingly, citing what Katherine Weiss has observed about Shepard's later play, *The God of Hell* (2004)—written and produced during the more recent and far more protracted Iraq War of 2003–11—one might say that here the dramatist also essentially draws "a direct line from the Frontier Days to modern, chemical warfare," by exposing "a culture of war which transforms expansion through violence into an infectious act of heroism" (Weiss 205).⁶

Ironically, the self-righteous hyper-masculinity and militarism advocated by the bellicose Colonel fail to shelter the characters from wallowing "in the various states of insanity and self-abuse" that he stigmatizes. The meager population of the family restaurant slowly degenerates into chaos—doing justice to the play's subtitle—which is demonstrated on stage in a succession of outlandish enactments pushing the physical comedy "beyond the naturalistic into the arena of mime," or the absurd (Creedon 148); there are farcical dances, food fights, acts of gratuitous violence and, notably, flagrant masturbation. When the exasperated, paralyzed Stubbs smashes his dessert (quite fittingly, a banana split, whose phallic shape mockingly plays up the young man's erectile dysfunction), the Colonel urges him to "[b]ecome a man," at which Stubbs moves in his wheelchair towards the white couple and starts chanting louder and louder the phrase:

⁶ For an illuminating discussion on the creation, development and maintaining of mythologies arising out of the western expansion whilst highlighting how America's westward expansion often invoked sacred authority for massacre and extermination, and thus effectively united aggression with "regeneration," see, for instance, Richard Slotkin's trilogy on the mythology of the American West: *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (1973), *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890* (1985), and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992). His extensive study *The Fatal Environment* shows the durability of the Myth of the Frontier and explicates its crucial role in America's rise to power.

“Become a man. . . . BECOME A MAN! . . . BECOME A MAN!” whilst staring at the White Man, who keeps quietly masturbating beneath a napkin under the table, unbeknown to his spouse (Shepard, *States of Shock* 26–27). As the scene progresses, the Colonel begins to “*savagely whip*” the insubordinate Stubbs with his belt, and as the whipping intensifies, the White Man “*continues getting more worked up*” and gradually reaches orgasm. Even though Stubbs is beaten to the floor and crawls around the stage on all fours, the Colonel keeps pummeling him “*relentlessly,*” while the White Woman, utterly oblivious, calmly continues to eat her clam chowder (26–28). Clearly, in its choice of stylistic devices, *States of Shock* represented “a radical shift from the lyrical realism” of its immediate dramatic predecessor, *A Lie of the Mind* (Wade, “*States of Shock*” 263). Its occasional, blatantly grotesque self-indulgence seems more redolent of the dramatist’s earliest, spontaneously experimental and provocative work, like his debut piece *The Rock Garden*. Yet, as rightly pointed out by Bottoms, it is exactly through such deliberate “slapstick depravity” that Shepard’s “disgust” with the nation’s degradation and haughty self-absorption achieves its fullest realization (248).

It is worth noting that the play’s absurd action escalates against the backdrop of intermittent explosions from outside the diner, regularly reminding the audience of an ongoing military conflict. One of the most intriguing aspects of *States of Shock* is that political violence is presented as threatening, and it slowly engulfs this supposed enclave of family values and consumerism both of which are located at the heart of America. The action is periodically interrupted as the cyclorama lights up with “*the fireworks of war*” (Shepard, *States of Shock* 28) and the audience is exposed to, or assailed by, percussive eruptions from offstage drummers and sounds of battle signalling the approaching warfare. Glory Bee first reports that the diner’s manager is dead (22), and next that the cook has been wounded (25). A while later, in one of the most “Surrealist” stage images of the one-act (Creedon 152), a metal busboy’s wagon loaded with gas masks arrives “*all by itself*” and parks centrestage (Shepard, *States of Shock* 40), marking the family diner as a warzone. The confused waitress airs her disbelief:

The thing I can’t get over is, it never occurred to me that “Danny’s” could be invaded. I always thought we were invulnerable to attack. The landscaping. The lighting. The parking lot. All the pretty bushes. Who would touch us? Who would dare? (40)⁷

⁷ Significantly, Glory Bee’s incredulous remarks, as well as her nostalgia for the relative stability of the Cold War, have gained new resonance since the play’s premiere due to such domestic incidents as the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing, the Oklahoma City bombing

Ostensibly, those who would dare are her fellow countrymen, for the closing image of *States of Shock* intimates that the United States is facing an enemy within, posing a threat far more problematic than either Communist Russians or Arab Islamists. Towards the end of the play, the two male protagonists swap places in Stubbs's flag-bedecked wheelchair: while the Colonel loses his potency and remains seated facing the audience, Stubbs unexpectedly regains the use of his legs and mounts a retaliation. He advances on the Colonel from behind and grabs him around the neck in a stranglehold (Shepard, *States of Shock* 45). He then seizes the Colonel's saber with both hands, "raises the sword in one quick and decisive movement, as though to decapitate the COLONEL," "freezes in that posture" as his alleged father "stares straight ahead," and exclaims through his gas mask: "GOD BLESS 'THE ENEMY!!!!!!!" (46). Whether the final tableau with which the playwright leaves us indicates an act of retribution or a revolution of sorts, such a prognostication of what the nation's future might hold in store is bound to disturb. Crucially, in those final moments both the seated Colonel and Stubbs look ahead, facing out towards the audience, which could be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the audience's presence. Hence, as suggested by Creedon, "the boundaries between actor, character, and performer dissolve, and the 'attitudes' that emerge indicate pretense, role-playing, and an 'acting-out' of selfhood" (151).

The Colonel and Stubbs remain frozen throughout the closing "vaudeville" act which further undermines any possibility of "a naturalistic interpretation" (Creedon 152) since the cast don gas masks and in unison perform an American folk standard "Goodnight Irene." The White Man intones the first stanza and the refrain:

Sometimes I live in the country
 Sometimes I live in the town
 Sometimes I have a great notion
 To jump into the river and drown
 Irene, good night
 Irene, good night
 Good night, Irene
 Good night, Irene
 I'll see you in my dreams,

in April 1995, and the September 11 attacks in 2001. No less shocking were the Columbine High School massacre (April 1999), the Virginia Tech shooting (April 2007), and the 2012 Aurora mass shooting in Colorado.

and the remaining characters, with the exception of Stubbs, join in (Shepard, *States of Shock* 46–47). The blues standard referencing unrequited love and suicidal tendencies, “juxtaposed starkly with the Damoclean sword hovering over Uncle Sam, wielded by his own ‘son’” (Bottoms 249), effectively closes this peculiar, if impassioned, play, offering an exuberantly theatrical polemic on the debilitatingly polarized mindset, a perpetuation of violence, as well as mindless consumerism, not to mention the nation’s moral apathy. Surely, *States of Shock* never aspired to be a “political” drama in any conventional sense. But even though the antics of the play’s cartoon characters infuse the brief work with absurdist comedy, its stance on war is unarguably serious. Untypically of Shepard, it displays “a crusading fervor” in its “indictment of militaristic enterprise and nationalistic allegiance” (Wade, “*States of Shock*” 263).

Shepard’s deliberate, perverse experimentation in *States of Shock*, which divided the play’s reviewers and Shepard scholars, deserves some more attention. The dramatist blatantly relinquishes here the more pared-down, “refined” and “distilled” approach of such canonical family dramas of the 1980s like *True West* or *Fool for Love*, which maintained, on the surface at least, the realistic façade (Bottoms 183). Rather he opts for a minimalistic stage set, plot fragmentation, jarring effects and grotesque, as well as overblown theatricality, whilst more willingly indulging his subversive impulses. Indeed, although propelled by the unraveling of a family secret, like *Fool for Love* or the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Buried Child* (1978), stylistically *States of Shock* seemed closer to the hallucinatory pieces of the mid-1960s, “more concerned with expressing a highly personal state of consciousness than with telling a story” (DeRose 134). Some readings of the play’s stylistics saw the drama as a deplorably retrogressive step in the playwright’s career, a relapse into his former tactics and once-effective dramatic devices. Frank Rich even begins his *New York Times* review of the play’s production at the American Theatre Place with the supposition that Shepard had been “hibernating since his East Village emergence in the Vietnam era.” “[I]n its own elliptical way,” Rich further argues that *States of Shock* is “an antiwar play, written with the earnest—one might even say quaint—conviction that the stage is still an effective platform for political dissent and mobilizing public opinion.” Although, as the reviewer concedes, the dramatist’s ingenuous faith in the power of theatre seems “uplifting,” “*States of Shock* is less so.” Nevertheless, as a counterpoint, there were also voices who welcomed Shepard’s apparent drifting away from the more orthodox adherence to realistic illusion visible in his family dramas of the 1980s. David J. DeRose, for instance, applauded Shepard’s exploratory approach and commitment to reinventing himself, and also attested

to the dramatist's nonconformist spirit. He suggested that notwithstanding the play's overt political symbolism or uneven tempo and tone, its "striking imagery and theatrical energy" heralded "not so much a regression as a rejuvenation of the impassioned (and somewhat reckless) theatrical genius" (137). From the critic's perspective, "a new incarnation" of this one-time rebel of alternative theatre (DeRose 137) prognosticated well for his future artistic development. An intriguing evaluation of Shepard's recent playwrighting has been ventured by William W. Demastes, who in his *Theatre of Chaos: Beyond Absurdism, Into Orderly Disorder* investigated the parallels between the arts and contemporary scientific thought (including the theory of chaos) by probing how twentieth-century American dramatists confronted "orderly disorder" and positioned themselves in relation to "two strongly influential movements that have polarized modern Western theatre": naturalism and absurdism, which argue respectively "for a linearly causal global perspective of human behaviour and for a local vision from which ultimately no human behavioral patterns can be abstracted" (104). Demastes reads Shepard's struggles in the theatre as necessarily "cultural struggles" and places him among America's "new realist" playwrights, who are

recently discovering that to turn away from the linear causality of the mechanists and to turn toward the dynamic, nonlinear, and evolving chaos of life may provide American culture—and indeed all of postmodern civilization—with a more accurate depiction of nature and a clearer vision of how to function within that universe. (128)

In some respects, *States of Shock* and the works that followed in the 1990s: the revisionist western *Silent Tongue* (1993) which Shepard wrote and directed, as well as his stage plays *Simpatico* (1994), *When the World Was Green: A Chef's Fable* (1996), *Eyes for Consuela* (1998), and *The Late Henry Moss* (2000), seemed to signal an interesting development in his mature writings marked by the growing importance of a contemplative, even ethical, element to Shepard's vision. Even if "the graying of the dramatist has brought with it a diminished output," as argued by Wade, one may observe in Shepard's work of that decade "a new introspection": the playwright's gravitation towards more relational thinking, and a sensibility less prone to disrupting than connecting ("*States of Shock*" 258, 276). *State of Shock* could be viewed as a self-conscious auto-critique of a sort, on the part of the author whom *The New York Times* once hailed as the "Playwright Laureate of the West" (Coe 35), for it reveals his "increasing awareness of the debilities attending masculinist codes and postures"

(Wade, “*States of Shock*” 261). It clearly deplores aggressive, exploitative expansionism by challenging the economies of domination that hark back to the frontier mentality. What is implied is that by exposing the deleterious effects of machismo and its divisive power games, there is a necessity to renegotiate the politics of relations, and the need for a more acute concern of empathetic involvement.

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Pinteresque Dialogue

ABSTRACT

The expression “Pinteresque” describing the characteristic features of Harold Pinter’s artistic output, established its position as a literary critical denominator many years ago. The aim of this article is to analyze some of the specific aspects of the playwright’s use of language. On several occasions, the artist made comments pertaining to certain issues concerning communication. He rejected the idea of the alienation of language and promoted the concept of evasive communication, thus showing people’s unwillingness to communicate. He also spoke about two kinds of silence, the first referring to a situation where there is actual silence, when “no word is spoken,” and the second, when “a torrent of language is being employed” in order to cover the character’s “nakedness.” Accordingly, Pinter’s plays may, depending on their perspective, be treated as dramas of language or of silence. This led Peter Hall, Pinter’s favourite theatre director and also a close friend, to notice that in the playwright’s *oeuvre* there is a clear distinction between three dots, a pause and a silence. This article discusses in detail the uneven distribution of pauses and silences in Harold Pinter’s 1977 play, *Betrayal*. It becomes evident that the use of different kinds of silence clearly indicates the emotional state of the characters at any given moment.

Keywords: Pinter, “Betrayal,” pause, silence.

It is not clear who first used the word “Pinteresque,” but it is obvious that by now it has acquired the status of an often used and accepted critical term describing the specific quality of Harold Pinter’s output. As early as 1968, Ronald Hayman wrote that the introduction of this descriptive term “must mean that [Pinter’s] style is the most distinctive, or at least, the most easily recognizable” (1). The word appears as an entry in various encyclopaedias and dictionaries, and so, for instance, *Brewer’s Theatre* defines it in the following way: “Pinteresque: Resembling the work or style of Harold Pinter. It is used especially of dialogue that resembles Pinter’s in being oblique, repetitive, interspersed with lengthy pauses . . . , menacing, and loaded with hidden meanings” (357).

Pinter worked out his dramatic dialogue according to the idea that real-life conversations do not proceed smoothly and logically—they are full of unfinished sentences, repetitions and inconsistencies. While discussing Pinter’s style, Hayman contends that: “This is the writing which succeeds by breaking all the rules of writing. It’s good because it’s so realistically full of bad syntax, tautologies, repetitions, pleonasms, non-sequiturs and self contradictions” (2). Similarly, G. S. Fraser concedes that Pinter’s language is a minute reproduction of real-life conversations. Moreover, he argues that what seems natural and realistic dialogue to actors is not one that is a precise reproduction of contemporary speech as, for instance, Pinter’s is, but a dialogue which reminds them of what they are used to speaking and hearing on the stage, an artistic reshaping of real life conversations (54–55). Thus, Pinter may be called an innovator as far as the introduction of a new kind of realistic dialogue is concerned.

Martin Esslin argues that Pinter “attempted in dramatic form what writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce have accomplished in the novel. He has tried to realize dramatically the complexities of consciousness and the subconsciousness” (13). He also points out the similarities between the plays of Pinter and the music of Webern (12). Correspondingly, using musical terminology, John Russell Taylor writes about the “orchestration” of Pinter’s language. According to Taylor, Pinter’s dialogue is an exact reproduction of everyday speech, yet

it is orchestrated with overtones and reminiscences, with unexpected resonances from what has gone before, so that the result is a tightly knit and intricate texture of which the “naturalistic” words being spoken at any given moment are only the top line, supported by elusive and intricate harmonies, or appearing some times in counterpoint with another theme from earlier in the play. (315)

This view stresses the fact that the words spoken at a given moment are important not only because of their exact meaning, but also because of the other “harmonies” evoked through them. Harry Burton, who, as he argues himself, “played several Mozart operas,” while recalling his experiences of taking part in the production, argues:

Playing Jerry was probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done. Because the play’s like a piece of music. . . . *Betrayal* is riddled with silences and pauses, and what I found doing Jerry was that you’d only done half your job in preparation once you’d learnt your part. I then had to learn the pauses and the silences, so that I could *play* them. And, you know, just as a piece of music requires diminuendos and silences and pauses and so on, every silence, every pause has a value musically, and if you don’t play them, you’re not hearing the piece—you’re not playing the *notes* properly either. (Smith 211)

Pinter himself likewise employed musical terminology, when he stressed his sensitivity to “the balance, the timing, and the rhythm . . . , the silent music, as it were” of language (qtd. in Hollis 92). This opinion, once again, links the tradition of Pinter with that of Webern, whose music, according to Witold Lutosławski, “is on the way towards silence” (qtd. in Norwall 54). It also suggests the importance of silence in Pinter’s theatre, one of the issues concerning language Pinter himself tackled. In 1962, during the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol, Pinter gave a speech which was later published under the title “Writing for the Theatre”:

Language . . . is a highly ambiguous commerce. So often, below words spoken, is the thing known and unspoken. . . .

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is the speaking of a language locked beneath it. This is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don’t hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.

We have heard many times that tired, grimy phrase: “Failure of communication” . . . and this phrase has been fixed to my work quite consistently. I believe the contrary. I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else’s life is too alarming. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility. (13, 14–15)

The first kind of silence, when no word is spoken, is marked in the play-text by three dots, a pause and a silence. The specific importance of pauses in Pinter's theatre has been noticed by a number of critics and theatre people, and is discernible in the introduction of an entry in *Brewer's Theatre*:

Pinter Pause: A long significant pause in stage dialogue. The name derives from Harold Pinter's characteristic use of the device; notoriously, he indicates his pauses explicitly in the text rather than leaving them to the discretion of the actors. John Gielgud has noted, "The 'Pinter Pause' is now a kind of copyright in the theatre world as it once was of the actor MACREADY in the nineteenth century." (357)¹

Pinter, thus, describes it: "The pause is a pause because of what has just happened in the minds and guts of the characters. They spring out of the text. They're not formal conveniences or stresses but part of the body of the action" (qtd. in Gale 273). Peter Hall, Pinter's favourite theatre director and also his friend, wrote in the following way about the importance of pauses in Pinter's drama:

Pinter's pauses have become, journalistically, his trademark, and it is easy to denigrate them, even to think that they are meaningless—to think the characters have nothing to say because they say nothing. This is never true. . . . [T]he unsaid in Pinter is as important as the said; and is frequently as eloquent. He once rang me and announced a rewrite: "Page thirty-seven," he said (I found page thirty seven). "Cut the pause." There was a smile in his voice as he spoke, but he was nevertheless dead serious. It was like cutting a speech. The placing of the pauses, and their emotional significance, have always been meticulously considered. His imitators do not understand this. He often uses neatly colloquial speech patterns. But by the use of silence and of pauses, he gives a precise form to the seemingly ordinary, and an emotional power to the mundane. It is a very expressive form of dramatic dialogue. ("Directing the Plays" 147–48)²

¹ Under the entry Macready (William, 1793–1871), we can read that he was an actor-manager, known as an eminent tragedian and that "He could . . . use silence to great effect: the term Macready pause is still used of a long significant pause" (*Brewer's Theatre* 282).

² On another occasion, Hall remarked: "A pause is really a bridge where the audience think that you're this side of the river, then when you speak again, you're on the other side. That's a pause. And it's alarming, often. It's a gap, which respectively gets filled in. It's not a dead stop—that's a silence, where the confrontation has become so extreme, there's nothing to be said until either the temperature has gone down, or the temperature has gone up, and then something quite new happens. Three dots is a very tiny hesitation, but it's

Pinter seems to have appreciated Hall's approach to the specificity of his playwriting as, in *The Paris Review* interview with Lawrence Bensusan, he said: "Hall once held a dot and pause rehearsal for the actors in *The Homecoming*. Although it sounds bloody pretentious, it was apparently very valuable" ("Art").

At this point, it seems justified to have a closer look at the use of silences and pauses in a concrete play. *Betrayal*, written in 1977, at the most basic level presents a marital triangle—Emma's (the wife of Robert) love affair with his friend, Jerry. The play, though, is not as trivial and simple as might be expected, this being due, among other things, to the appearance of different kinds of betrayal in the drama, and also to the specific time structure of the piece. *Betrayal*, as Susan Hollis Merritt argues, got a mixed reception from the theatre critics, "with arguments ranging from its being totally superficial and emotionally remote to its being deeply profound and emotionally intense" (233).³ Benedict Nightingale opposed the criticism concerning the play and stressed the advantages of its theme, specific time structure and masterly use of language:

[*Betrayal* is] one of Pinter's most successful exercises in presenting the least and evoking the most. What looks flat commonly has fissures of feeling beneath it, and what sounds banal can be magnificently resonant. . . . It substitutes the question "how?" for the cruder "what next" in the minds of the audience. And in my view it deepens and darkens our perception of the play, infecting the most innocent encounter with irony, dread and a sense of doom. . . . [Its every sentence expresses] desire, hurt, regret, rage or some concatenation of the impulses that are pounding about the slippery brainboxes of these artful dodgers. (718)

The drama consists of nine scenes and moves backwards in time. The first scene, set in 1977, presents the meeting of Emma and Jerry whose love affair ended two years earlier and contains (on 20 pages of text) 1 silence and 36 pauses. Scene Two, taking place slightly later in the same year, shows a meeting between Jerry and Robert (14 pages, 3 silences, 27 pauses). Scene Three moves back in time to 1975, when Emma and Jerry break up their love affair (20 pages, 7 silences, 12 pauses). In Scene Four, which shifts back to 1974, we witness Jerry paying a visit to Emma

there, and it's different from a semicolon which Pinter almost never uses, and it's different from a comma. A comma is something that you catch up on, you go through it. And a full stop's just a full stop. You stop" ("Directing Pinter" 26).

³ Merritt provides an extensive survey of criticism concerning the play, its successive theatre productions and film version (231–39).

and Robert (11 pages, not a single silence, 6 pauses). In Scene Five, set in Venice in 1973, Robert finds a letter written by Jerry to Emma and gets her confirmation concerning the betrayal (13 pages, 6 silences, 22 pauses). Scenes Six and Seven, both taking place in the same year, just after the married couple's return from Italy, present the meetings of the lovers and the two friends, respectively. In the former, Emma meets Jerry (11 pages, no silences, 8 pauses), while in the latter Robert, the betrayed husband, meets Jerry, his friend (14 pages, no silences, 4 pauses). Scene Eight (summer 1971) presents Emma and Jerry in their rented place where they hold their secret meetings (10 pages, 1 silence, 19 pauses). Finally, the last, the ninth scene, demonstrates how the love affair started in 1968 at a party in Robert and Emma's house. It contains no pauses or silences (6 pages).

The specific character of the last scene is unique not only in the absence of pauses or silences, and the almost complete lack of three dots (they are used only twice), but also in its brevity. As it presents falling in love at first sight (almost, as they have met earlier), both Jerry and Emma feel at ease. When Robert enters the room, the following exchange takes place:

EMMA

Your best friend is drunk.

JERRY

As your best man and oldest friend and, in the present instance, my host, I decided to take this opportunity to tell your wife how beautiful she was.

ROBERT

Quite right.

JERRY

It is quite right, to . . . to face up to the facts . . . and to offer a token, without a blush, a token of one's unalloyed appreciation, no holds barred.

ROBERT

Absolutely. (137)

When Robert leaves the room, "*Jerry grasps her arm. [. . .] They stand still. Looking at each other*" (138).

Antonia Fraser, Pinter's wife, thus writes about *Betrayal*: "Peter [Hall] says it's a bleak play but I think it's about the affirmation of love, hence the ending on love, even if it begins with bleakness *after* the ending of love" (91). Slightly later, she writes:

For me, the unique quality of *Betrayal* was best captured by Samuel Beckett in his note to Harold after he had read the script. He referred to

the power of the last scene which is in fact the first scene chronologically, the dawn of the love affair; “the first last look in the shadows, after all those in the light to come, a curtain of curtains.” It is this sense of fore-knowledge which clutches me with pain every time I see the play. (91)

It seems that the uneven distribution of silences and pauses in concrete scenes is indicative of the different emotional states the characters are in, at a given moment, and also of the rapport between them. The last scene presents all three characters as being relaxed and at ease, there are no tensions among them, and, therefore, they do not need to use masks to “cover their nakedness.” On the other hand, the first scene, charged with emotions and presenting Emma and Jerry two years after their love affair ended, contains 36 pauses and one silence. We learn that Emma and Robert had a quarrel the previous night and decided to get divorced. Under the pressure of the moment, Emma decided to call Jerry and arrange their meeting, her move being due, perhaps, to the fact that she had learned about Robert’s betrayal of her for years, or, which is equally possible, because she still keeps thinking about Jerry, as she herself confesses. The dots and pauses in their conversation mark moments of hesitation, moments when they feel rather uneasy. On such occasions, which uncover their “nakedness,” they employ the other kind of silence, “a torrent of words.” These keep their real feelings hidden. After a burdening and threatening pause, they often change the subject and start talking about Emma’s work in the gallery (14), Jerry asks about Robert (15), Emma about Jerry’s son while Jerry about Emma’s (16) and Emma mentions meeting Jerry’s daughter, Charlotte, in the street (18). Their dialogue proceeds, centring round Charlotte:

EMMA

[. . .] She remembers you, as an old friend.

JERRY

That’s right.

Pause

Yes, everyone was there that day, standing around, your husband, my wife, all the kids, I remember.

EMMA

What day?

JERRY

When I threw her up. It was in your kitchen.

EMMA

It was in your kitchen.

Silence

JERRY
 Darling.
 EMMA
 Don't say that.
Pause
 It all . . .
 JERRY
 Seems such a long time ago.
 EMMA
 Does it? (20–21)

The purpose of Pinter's use of pauses and a silence in this short excerpt seems quite clear. The first pause, belonging to Jerry, which breaks up his utterance, follows the reference to his being "an old friend," and seems slightly, at least, ironic in the context of his having been Emma's lover. To avoid his/their "nakedness" being exposed, he employs "a torrent of words" and refers to the incident in the kitchen, which has been discussed earlier in their conversation. Emma does not seem to be involved in real communication, either. She is lost in her thoughts, absent-minded, which is highlighted by her question "What day?" Their inability to establish real contact is marked by the silence which comes soon afterwards. Then, after Emma's refusal to being referred to as "darling," a pause and her "It all" are followed by three dots. These indicate her being ill at ease. Only then does the dialogue proceed more smoothly. But, not for a long time. Trying to get out of an awkward situation, Jerry suggests another drink. When he comes back, she repeats the sentence she uttered some time earlier: "I thought of you the other day" (21, 12). As she does not get any response from Jerry, this being indicated by a pause, she delivers a short monologue, only momentarily interrupted by Jerry's "Yes" (21).

Harry Burton, an actor sensitive to the musical quality of Pinter's writing, thus comments on the beginning of the drama, in which he played the part of Jerry:

I think that the first scene in *Betrayal* is particularly difficult, because it begins with an exchange of apparently extremely commonplace, mundane, apparently "ordinary" stuttering comments. It's an almost embarrassed reunion between two people who have had an affair but who haven't seen each other for two years. To find the right way to play Jerry in that single scene was the hardest thing for me in the rehearsal period, because again and again I would be losing concentration. (Smith 215)

Scene Three, even though it is the same length as Scene One, contains a smaller number of pauses (only 12 compared to 36) and a considerably larger number of silences (7 and not only 1). This is indicative of the emotional state of Emma and Jerry at the moment their love affair ends. The scene presents Emma and Jerry in their rented meeting place:

Silence

JERRY

What do you want to do then?

Pause

EMMA

I don't quite know what we're doing, any more, that's all.

JERRY

Mmmm.

Pause

EMMA

I mean this flat . . .

JERRY

Yes. (49)

The scene is unquestionably characterized by great tension, this being signalled by its opening, when, for a long time, we are given the chance to watch two silent people. What follows are attempts by Emma to start a conversation, Jerry's unresponsiveness and the accompanying shorter (dots) and longer (pauses) in which there are moments of a complete lack of sound. The scene continues, and Emma argues that there is no point in getting another electric fire as:

[. . .] we're never here.

JERRY

We're here now.

EMMA

Not really.

Silence

JERRY

Well, things have changed. You've been so busy, your job, and everything. (51)

At the beginning of this episode, Jerry seems to be unaware or not willing to confess that he realizes it is all over. Then, however, he confirms that continuing the affair is pointless, at first accusing her of having too lit-

tle time to keep it going, and then slightly later on placing the blame partly on himself and, then, finally on them both being married:

JERRY

It would not matter how much we wanted to [meet] if you're not free in the afternoons and I'm in America.

Silence

Nights have always been out of the question and you know it. I have a family.

EMMA

I have a family too.

JERRY

I know that perfectly well I might remind you that your husband is my oldest friend.

EMMA

What do you mean by that?

JERRY

I don't *mean* anything by it.

EMMA

But what are you trying to say by saying that?

JERRY

Jesus. I'm not *trying* to say anything. I've said precisely what I wanted to say.

EMMA

I see.

Pause

The fact is that in the old days we used our imagination and we'd take a night and make an arrangement to go to an hotel.

JERRY

Yes. We did.

Pause

But that was . . . in the main . . . before we got this flat.

EMMA

We haven't spent many nights . . . in this flat.

JERRY

No.

Pause

Not many nights anywhere, really.

Silence

EMMA

Can you afford . . . to keep it going, month after month?

JERRY

Oh . . .

EMMA

It's a waste. [. . .] It's ridiculous.

Pause

It's just . . . an empty home.

JERRY

It's not a home.

Pause

I know . . . I know what you wanted . . . but it could never . . . actually be a home. You have a home. I have a home. With curtains, etcetera. And children. Two children in two homes. There are no children here, so it's not the same kind of home.

EMMA

It was never intended to be the same kind of home. Was it?

Pause

You didn't ever see it as a home, in any sense, did you?

JERRY

No, I saw it as a flat . . . you know.

EMMA

For fucking.

JERRY

No, for loving.

EMMA

Well, there's not much of that left, is there?

Silence

JERRY

I don't think we don't love each other.

Pause

EMMA

Ah well.

Pause

What will we do about all the . . . furniture? (54–55)

From the above scene it transpires that the affair is over. Furthermore, the masterly use of pauses and silences indicates that, even though Emma herself suggests ending the affair, she is, in fact, reluctant to do so. She did want to make the flat a home, her having brought a tablecloth from Venice, which is mentioned in the scene, being indicative of this. There was a moment, too, immediately following her return from Italy, when she hoped they could change their lives, an idea which was immediately rejected by Jerry (127–28). Jerry, on the other hand, wants to make it absolutely clear that it was only a passing episode, and while parting, cynically hurts Emma by reminding her that Robert is his friend.

Another scene in which there are a great number of silences is Scene Five, where the truth of what really happened in Venice is revealed. It is not astonishing because, as the parting scene, it presents an emotional climax for the its participants. It could come as a surprise, though, that Scene Seven,

which presents the meeting of the two friends after Robert's return from Italy, is absolutely devoid of silences and contains only 4 pauses. Taking into account the fact that Robert has just discovered that he has been betrayed not only by his wife but also by his best friend, one could expect his violent reaction. However, none comes, at least in the dialogue between them. Nevertheless, Robert vents his anger by showing impatience towards a waiter in addition to his subsequent outburst concerning him being a bad journalist. One explanation for his strange behaviour might be the fact that he himself is also having a love affair, thus betraying his own wife.

Alrene Sykes discusses the affinities between the art of Pinter and that of Strindberg, claiming that both playwrights "share a common emphasis on psychic conflict as the essence of drama" and that "Pinter's practice in dialogue in many ways fulfils quite precisely Strindberg's theory" (98). She finishes her comparison of the two artists by saying:

And if a character from a play may be taken for once as an author's mouthpiece, one might quote the Old Man of *The Ghost Sonata* as expressing a sentiment identical with Pinter's: "OLD MAN: . . . Silence cannot hide anything—but words can." (Sykes 99)

Similarly, Ruth in Pinter's *The Homecoming* argues that the very act of speaking is sometimes of greater importance than the message conveyed by the words uttered: "My lips move. Why don't you restrict . . . your observation to that? Perhaps the fact that they move is more significant . . . than the words which come through them. You must bear . . . that . . . possibility . . . in mind" (69).

In the context of Pinter's theatre of silence, it is worth recalling the experiments conducted by Stanislavsky in the Moscow Art Theatre, who gave his opinion on and definition of the clues for actors hidden beneath the surface of the dialogue. He called them the subtext of a play:

The subtext is a web of innumerable, varied inner patterns inside a play and a part, woven from the "magic ifs," given circumstances, all sorts of figments of the imagination, inner movements, objects of attention, smaller and greater truths and a belief in them, adaptations, adjustments and other similar elements. It is the subtext that makes us say the words we do in a play. (qtd. in Styan 13)

Stanislavsky stressed the importance of an idea which is crucial to Pinter's artistic conception—the co-existence of the spoken word and that which is hidden beneath. This is very significant, perhaps even more so

than the one which is actually uttered. Arguing that there are two levels of language, Pinter does not allow a real silence to last too long. Even if a character is silent, the subtext is still present. Thus, the silence is not merely an absence of sound. James Hollis also stressed this notion when he wrote: "Silence is more than an absence and Pinter's gift has been to create dramatic representations of silence as a presence" (17).

The second type of silence mentioned by Pinter, when "a torrent of language is being employed," as "a constant stratagem to cover nakedness," is often encountered in Pinter's drama for example, the aforementioned reference in the scene when Jerry picked Charlotte up, threw her up in the air and caught her in the kitchen, is repeated twice. Pinter's dialogue can be viewed, and discussed, from the point of view of the language games which people play in order to avoid the horrors of true intimacy. A reference to these ideas is expressed by Eric Berne in his book *Games People Play*. His characters play talking games as a means of escaping the feeling of loneliness, as well as games of pretended polite conversation as a smoke screen to hostility, in addition to games of deception, lying and cheating. In most cases, the dialogue between Pinter's characters is a form of dissimulation. While having a conversation, the characters are simultaneously playing a game of hide and seek—each of them is trying to find the meaning the other has hidden beneath the words that have actually been spoken, the subtextual stream of reference. In Pinter's plays, language games often function as metaphors for the battle in which the characters are involved. His people frequently become wily players seeking to gain the upper hand in their social interactions, in order to belong to "the larger field of *social dynamics*" (Berne 46). The linguistic quarrel between Gus and Ben concerning the correctness of such phrases as "light the kettle" and "light the gas" in *The Dumb Waiter* (141) and the one between the Sands' over the question of whether Mr. Sands was "sitting" or "perching" in *The Room* (116), are examples of this kind. Such contests of wills indicate which of the characters is dominant. In this context, it is worth mentioning James Hollis. Paraphrasing von Clausewitz's definition of "war," Hollis argued that language may be called "a continuation of tension by other means" (Hollis 123). Characters often play a game of questions and answers, which may follow one of two modes: the phatic, which consists of a series of irrelevant questions and seeks to establish contact between the characters, and the rhetorical, the dividing mode, where one of the partners aims at establishing his domination over the other. Both modes can be seen in Pinter's output. Sometimes they appear separately, at others one changes into the other. The most obvious examples of the phatic mode changing

into the rhetorical occur in the interrogation scenes in *The Birthday Party* (57–63) and throughout nearly the whole of *One for the Road*.

Unquestionably, Pinter's language possesses a number of characteristic features, which makes the term "Pinteresque" fully justifiable. The playwright, however, detested the phrase and objected to its use in an interview conducted by Bensky: "That word! These damn words and that word. *Pinteresque* particularly—I don't know what they're bloody well talking about!" (Pinter, "Art"). A few years earlier, however, he said:

I'm speaking with some reluctance, knowing that there are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement, depending on where you're standing at the time or what the weather's like. A categorical statement, I find, will never stay where it is and be finite. It will immediately be subject to modification by the other twenty-three possibilities of it. No statement I make, therefore, should be interpreted as final and definitive. One or two of them may sound final and definitive, they may be *almost* final and definitive, but I won't regard them as such tomorrow, and I wouldn't like you to do so today. (Pinter, "Writing" 9)

The above words were uttered by Pinter in the context of him not being a theorist or a critic, and were meant to be a qualifier for what he wanted to say about his playwriting. The notion of the relativity of meaning and the multiplicity of its ensuing interpretations is a characteristic feature of many artistic enterprises, including Pinteresque art. Pinter began his Nobel lecture "Art, Truth & Politics" by saying:

In 1958 I wrote the following:

There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily true or false, it can be both true and false.

I believe that these assumptions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false?

The relativity pertaining to the seemingly obvious juxtaposition of truth and lies is also applicable to Pinter's theatre, which may justifiably be called both the theatre of language and the theatre of silence, especially if one takes into account the playwright's distinction between the two kinds of silence. This feature, characterizing the artist's output, is probably discernible in the

critical term “Pinteresque.” Even though Pinter objected to its application, it has become a part of critical terminology. Peter Hall, an expert in Pinter’s dramatic language, has stated:

He makes us realise that poetic drama could be mined out of real speech. . . . I think Harold is a masterly poet. And that’s why he finally towers above everybody else, whatever their merits. “Pinteresque” is simply the label of his style. He has created an entire world out of Cockney speech. (qtd. in Billington 391)

The playwright, Per Wästberg, a Member of the Swedish Academy, and Chairman of its Nobel Committee, said in his Noble Prize Presentation Speech on December 10, 2005: “Harold Pinter is the renewer of English drama in the 20th century. ‘Pinteresque’ is an adjective listed in the Oxford Dictionary. Like Kafka, Proust and Graham Greene he has charted a territory, a Pinterland with a distinct topography.”

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TRADITIONAL EPIC PATTERNS SEEN IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF MODERNITY

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Éowyn and the Biblical Tradition of a Warrior Woman

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the portrayal of Éowyn in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in the light of the biblical tradition of the warrior woman. The author focuses on the scene in which Éowyn slays the Nazgûl Lord in the battle of the Pelennor Fields with the help of Meriadoc. This event is juxtaposed against the biblical descriptions of female warriors, in particular Jael and Judith. A detailed analysis of passages from the King James Bible and the Douay-Rheims Bible, with which Tolkien was familiar, allows the reader to detect numerous affinities between his vocabulary and imagery, and their biblical antecedents. Filipczak contends that, by defending the body of the dying Théoden, Éowyn defends the whole kingdom; her action can be interpreted in the light of *The King's Two Bodies* by Ernst Kantorowicz. Her threat to the Ringraith ("I will smite you if you touch him") makes use of the verb that can be found in the descriptions of Jael and Judith in the Protestant and Catholic Bibles respectively. Furthermore, Éowyn's unique position as a mortal woman who achieves the impossible and thus fulfills the prophecy paves the way for a comparison with the Virgin Mary, whose Magnificat contains elements of "a holy-war song" which were suppressed by traditional interpretations. Consequently, the portrayal of Éowyn blends the features of Jael, Judith and Mary with allusions to St. Joan of Arc. Moreover, her act of slaying the Ringraith's fell beast reinterprets the story of St. George and the dragon. Filipczak argues that Éowyn's uniqueness is additionally emphasized because she acts out Gandalf's words from Minas Tirith and sends the Nazgûl Lord into nothingness.

Keywords: Tolkien, Éowyn, Bible, Jael, Judith.

It is a paradox shared by the Bible and *The Lord of the Rings* that when men are at a loss, it is a woman who steps in and takes the initiative by confronting and defeating the enemy whose power greatly exceeds her own. This is certainly true of several heroines in the Bible, for example Deborah and Jael from the Book of Judges, Esther and Judith (whose book is present in the Catholic, but not in Protestant canon). Each of the women achieves something remarkable that saves the Israelites. Prophetess Deborah becomes a leader of the army. Esther saves the Israelites from death due to her beauty and skill. Jael and Judith slay the enemies of their nation, which paves the way for the comparison with Éowyn who slays the Nazgûl Lord in the battle of the Pelennor Fields. The difference between the exploits of Jael and Judith, and that of Éowyn is considerable. The heroines of the biblical narrative trick their respective enemies with their behaviour suggesting either safety (Jael) or seduction (Judith). Éowyn confronts her overpowering antagonist in the battlefield; her fate seems hopeless and yet she defeats him. Still, the similarities between the two biblical heroines, often termed warrior women in criticism, and Éowyn, allow us to frame her deed in the tradition that Tolkien was inspired by.¹

The biblical heroines are introduced in the patriarchal narrative as women marked by their connection with men. Jael is described as the wife of Heber, the Kenite; Judith, the daughter of Merari, as the pious and disconsolate widow of Manasses. Éowyn is important because of her connection with the House of Eorl, her status as Eomund's daughter and Éomer's sister. Jael and Judith are concerned with their female duties. The same can be said about Tolkien's creation, Théoden's niece, who is an obedient, even if unwilling, custodian of her people in Helm's Deep, and who eventually embraces the role of a healer.

This portrait of Éowyn proves Tolkien's familiarity with the King James Bible and the Douay-Rheims Bible (Ganong 63). As a writer immersed in the English tradition and as a practicing Catholic, Tolkien knew both texts, so he must have noticed the two warrior women. His description of Éowyn is also informed by the story of Joan of Arc, as has been pointed out in Tolkien criticism (Burns 255), as well as by the legends of St. George slaying the dragon. All these elements are intertwined in the scene when Éowyn confronts the Nazgûl Lord and deals out a deadly blow, first to his fell beast and then to him. Above all, however, the biblical story of Judith must have reached Tolkien through the mediation of the

¹ I am very grateful to Professor Andrzej Wicher for his detailed and insightful comments which allowed me to make several points in this text more nuanced.

Old English poem about the heroine.² Let us unpack the biblical intertexts to show their relevance for this particular passage from *The Lord of the Rings*.

Jael (Jahel in Douay Bible) is described as the one who apparently offers shelter to Sisera. When he falls asleep in her tent, she puts a “tent nail” (tent peg) to his temple and drives it into his head by means of a hammer. Judith, who leaves the Israeli town besieged by Holofernes’ army, ventures into his camp in attractive clothes and misrepresents herself to his guards as the one who wants to lead the commander into glory by betraying the Israelite secrets. Holofernes is so taken with her flattery and beauty that he drinks himself to sleep during supper after they have been left alone. Judith begins to pray, and immediately seizes his sword, cuts off his head, which she throws into her food bag and carries back into the Israeli camp, much to the later shock of the hostile army which is immediately beaten by the Jews. Both heroines fight as women, and never use a male disguise, which was forbidden on the grounds of the ban on crossdressing in Deuteronomy.

Éowyn crossdresses like Joan of Arc in order to accompany Théoden, the rightful king of Rohan. Her disguise serves her well till the moment when she decides to reveal herself as a woman in response to the Ringwraith’s words: “No living man may hinder me! . . . no living man am I,” she replies (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 841). Then she proceeds to confront him and his fell beast as a woman, and the Nazgûl Lord is trapped in the incompleteness of Glorfindel’s famous prophecy. In contrast to *Macbeth*, where the protagonist is the only person who hears his death foretold, in *The Lord of the Rings* Glorfindel’s prophecy is widely known (Brennan Croft 215). However, in both cases the cryptic message is fully revealed when the character spoken about gets killed. In *The Lord of the Rings* the killer is not only a woman but “a chaste maiden,” this being an echo of the Old English retelling of the Book of Judith (Neville 109). Commenting on the Old English version of the biblical text, Hugh Magennis states: “Rather than minimising her difficulties in carrying out this act as a woman, the poet highlights her ostensible unsuitedness to the task, thereby magnifying her faith and achievement” (18).

The female identity of the three heroines, Jael, Judith and Éowyn, is emphasized in the texts in various ways. The Book of Judges makes Sisera ask Jael for water, but she gives him milk. This highlights her maternal and protective role by which he is deceived (Brenner-Idan 105). Her tent

² I am grateful to Professor Barbara Kowalik from the University of Warsaw for kindly pointing this out to me.

brings to mind a womb inside which Sisera loses his life, but the Israelites are reborn. Judith's deed became the subject of many European paintings. A startling interpretation by Artemisia Gentileschi, a female painter, shows Judith applying the sword to a head between the intertwined arms of the leader, which look like thighs from which the head is emerging as if in an ironic parody of childbirth (Bal). Rather than give birth to her own children, Judith will bring to the Israelites a wrapped-up head of their enemy, signifying the rebirth of their nation.

In both biblical scenes where the beautiful women confront the male enemy, the suspicion of seduction is in the air, but the biblical text keeps all the impropriety at bay, even if the scene is an ironic reversal of sexual intimacy. The Book of Judges says about Sisera: "At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down" (5:27),³ which is apparently rendered in a more accurate way by the translation "between her legs he fell, he lay," and this indicates either sex or childbirth (Brenner-Idan 103). In the Book of Judith the eunuch that opens the tent after the commotion in the camp presumes he will find Holofernes in bed with the Israelite woman, but the male body sprawling, as if exhausted, on the ground, is headless.

Éowyn is also surrounded by the attributes of the female role. Her previous identification with a cup-bearing valkyrie makes her a proper escort to men going into battle and braving the passage to the world of the ancestors. Her compassion and care for the king in whose shadow she loyally stands as if she were his own daughter is exemplary. Finally, her role of the guardian of her people results in a symbolic reversal of childbirth imagery. She leads them to Helm's Deep, as if back into the womb where they should be safe. But there is more than meets the eye. Her refusal to leave dying Théoden's body to the Nazgûl's fell beast reverses the traditional role division. "I will smite you, if you touch him" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 841), she says to the black captain, as if Théoden were a frail damsel in distress. Incidentally, in the King James Version, Jael smites Sisera, while the Douay Bible says that "the heart of Holofernes was smitten" at the sight of Judith (12:16). This anticipates his being literally smitten, so Éowyn's phrase has an intertextual ring.

What else is Éowyn defending? Her action can easily be interpreted in light of *The King's Two Bodies* by Ernst Kantorowicz, whose ideas Tolkien's book seems to uncannily anticipate. Théoden's body signifies his kingdom by extension. Its dismemberment by the unclean beast would have augured the collapse and ruin of Rohan in the conflict with Mordor.

³ Unless stated explicitly, quotations from the Bible (with the exception of The Book of Judith) come from the King James Bible.

Just like Théoden's weakness of mind prompted by Saruman's devious servant Wormtongue signified Rohan's defenselessness, so could his body have signified the defeat of the Rohirrim in the clash with the dark army. Éowyn is thus defending the whole kingdom. A self-styled guardian of the rightful king like Joan of Arc, Éowyn shields him with her own body. The shieldmaiden prevents this sacred emanation of the kingdom from being desecrated. And she does prevent the fell beast from feasting on the body, by cutting off its head.

The passage about Jael can be brought into the picture to throw light on the scene from Tolkien's work: "She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; where he bowed, there he fell down dead" (Judges 5:26). In *The Lord of the Rings* Éowyn, whose shield arm is shattered by the Nazgûl's mace, hears her name called by Meriadoc, who had slashed the Ringwraith's sinew, thus bringing about his fall in front of her:

With her last strength she drove her sword between crown and mantle as the great shoulders bowed before her. This sword broke sparkling into many shards. The crown rolled away with a clang. Éowyn fell forward upon her fallen foe. But lo! the mantle and hauberk were empty. Shapeless they lay now on the ground, torn and tumbled. (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 842)

Like Sisera, the Nazgûl seems "bowed" before Éowyn, who smites him with her sword, piercing through the emptiness between the mantle and the crown which rolls off to indicate a symbolic decapitation of the bodiless black captain. The way she falls on him is an echo of an inversion of intimacy in the scenes involving female slayers from the Bible. The Nazgûl's clothes are a *pars pro toto*; they lay down instead of the body which was not there: "they lay on the ground torn and tumbled," bringing to mind the maimed bodies of the two biblical antagonists: Sisera and Holofernes, whose downfall is quite graphically described by the biblical writers.

The scene of Nazgûl's death restates one more motif from the Bible, namely the death of king Abimelech, "the anti-hero of the Book of Judges" (Klein 70). During a siege he laid to Thebez "a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull" (Judges 9: 53). The deed is mentioned in 2 Samuel 11:21 in the words that point to Tolkien's biblical inspirations: "Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubesheth? Did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the

wall, that he died in Thebez?” The word “smite” that was used by Éowyn in Tolkien’s novel is here combined with the uniqueness of a woman who put an end to the reign of the infamous king.

While Abimelech’s slayer remains anonymous, Jael’s and Judith’s heroic exploits give them a unique position among the Israelis. Prophetess Deborah opens her song about the victory of Israel with the words: “Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be” (Judges 5:24). Judith is called the heroine of Israel by the high priest, and she hears the words: “Blessed art thou by thy God” (13:31), a probable echo of Deborah’s song according to biblical scholars. Interestingly, the only other woman who is called blessed in the Bible is the Virgin Mary (Massyngbaerde Ford 19). It is noted that her song (Magnificat) is informed by the register that sees God as the warrior who “hath shewed might in his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat” (Luke 1:51). Massyngbaerde Ford contends that “Mary was a Jael-Judith figure (to her contemporaries), perhaps even a feminine zealot. The canticle that she sings bears all the marks of a holy-war song” (23). How does Éowyn come into that? Although Tolkien is never explicitly biblical in his text, his imagery is saturated with religious meaning, especially in the conflict of light and darkness in the analyzed scene.

Éowyn is repeatedly associated with sunlight or light in general. “Her bright hair gleamed with pale gold” as she took off “the helmet of secrecy” in front of the black captain, unveiling her identity (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 842). Then after she kills the Nazgûl’s fell beast, the aftermath of the event is thus focalized by Éowyn’s helper Meriadoc: “a light fell about her and her hair shone in the sunrise.” The imagery brings to mind “a woman clothed with the sun,” who in the Revelation (12:1) is about to give birth to her child but her offspring is threatened by the red dragon, and she eventually has to flee after her child has been rescued by God. The identity of the woman from the Revelation is still disputed by biblical scholars. Identified with the church of God she is also said to allude to the blessed Lady, whose unique status in the plan of salvation makes her an ideal representative of the community of the saved (Jeffrey 846). The woman is pitted against the might that by far exceeds her own, and yet justice prevails the way it did in the Book of Judges and the Book of Judith. At the same time Éowyn can be associated with the beloved from a passage in the Song of Songs that reads: “Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array” (Douay-Rheims 6:9)? The traditional “answer” has often been Mary (Griffiths 141). The attributes connected with mariological imagery inform most descriptions of Tolkien’s warrior woman.

Éowyn's unique status is stressed in Tolkien's narrative. Unlike Luthien from *Silmarillion*, or Aragorn's beloved Arwen, or powerful Galadriel, Éowyn is a mere mortal, who achieves the impossible with the help of small but determined Meriadoc, who deals the first blow to the Nazgûl. Aragorn thus comments on Éowyn in the Houses of Healing:

For she was pitted against a foe beyond the strength of her mind and body. And those who will take a weapon against such an enemy must be sterner than steel, if the very shock shall not destroy them. It was an evil doom that set her in his path. For she is a fair maiden, fairest lady of a house of queens . . . a white flower, standing proud and shapely, as a lily. . . . her deeds have set her among the queens of great renown. (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 866–67)

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Aragorn's words parallel the praises sung by Deborah about Jael or Judith's celebration of God and herself in a song of praise. The lily, of course, is rich in meaning: first, through the connection with the Song of Songs; then, through the parable in which Jesus sets the lily's worth above the wisdom of Solomon. Finally, the classic motif in iconographic Mariolatry is the representation of the Virgin Mary with lilies. Besides, Éowyn becomes like the woman from Genesis, who experiences enmity towards the serpent, Satan, or, simply, foe.

Interestingly, her story also rewrites the legend of St. George and the dragon, in which the saint defeats the dragon in order to rescue an innocent princess. In *The Lord of the Rings* it is the innocent princess who defends the mighty king Théoden from the dragon-like beast. In different historical contexts St. George could be identified with a national hero defending the country from invaders, which was the case in Sweden, where the dragon sculpted in Stockholm cathedral represented Denmark defeated by Sten Sture (Scott 116). This completes my interpretation because of the political role of Éowyn. She defeats the fell beast that the ruler of Mordor gave to his servant, the Ringwraith. She also defends Rohan, by protecting the king's sacred body. Even though the king is conscious, he is not capable of action, an interesting parallel to the dauphin who was incapable of defending France in the time of Joan of Arc. Those who admired Joan referred to biblical examples to appreciate her. Thus Christine de Pizan juxtaposed her to Judith, and to Deborah (Allen 556).

Éowyn's encounter with the Nazgûl Lord follows Gandalf's encounter with him for a reason. In the book, these two moments are separated by one chapter; in the film, Jackson additionally emphasizes the similarity between the two scenes by highlighting the presence of Peregrin near Gandalf, thus

twinning the scene with the one where Éowyn is assisted by Pippin's friend, Merry. It is striking that Éowyn completes what was initiated in the scene involving Gandalf. When the Nazgûl Lord rides under the archway that "no enemy ever yet had passed" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 829) in Minas Tirith, Gandalf is the only one to endure the terror of his presence and say: "You cannot enter here . . . Go back to the abyss that is prepared for you! Go back! Fall into the nothingness that awaits you and your Master. Go!" (829). But the Nazgûl is not intimidated by these words: "from a mouth unseen there came a deadly laughter" (829). He then prepares to kill Gandalf saying: "Die now and curse in vain," but he is suddenly distracted by the crowing of a cock and the blowing of horns (829). The image is haunted by the biblical phrase "the shadows of death," a familiar expression signifying a dangerous and liminal experience in Psalm 23: "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil" (23:4). Although the phrase "the shadows of death" sounds disturbing in the context of the conflict with Mordor, the biblical ring of the intertext undercuts hopelessness, becoming a harbinger of new times for those who walk on through the shadows of death and fear no evil.

Strikingly, one of them is Éowyn; she fulfills Gandalf's words and sends the Nazgûl into nothingness. She also echoes his laughter in an ironic way: "Merry heard of all sounds in that hour the strangest. It seemed that Dernhelm laughed and the clear voice was like the ring of steel" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 841). Thus Éowyn not only parries the Nazgûl's would-have-been attack on Gandalf, but also parries his deadly laughter from the scene in Minas Tirith. In fact, the Nazgûl had used laughter as his attribute before to a startling effect: "Then the Witch-king laughed and none that heard it ever forgot the horror of that cry, but Glorfindel rode up then on his white horse, and in the midst of his laughter the Witch-king turned to flight" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1051). Unlike the Witch-king, Éowyn does not turn to flight at the sight of a powerful enemy, but proceeds to unveil herself and fight. Thus what did not happen in Minas Tirith happens in the Pelennor Fields. The Nazgûl is barred from moving further on and causing havoc, for even though the "knights of Théoden's house lay slain about the king . . . one stood there still," and she held her ground (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 840). As a result, the Witch-king was "brought to nothing," as stated in the footnote to the part of the appendix discussing the rulers of Rohan (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1070).

In the above scene Éowyn repeats Gandalf's confrontation with Balrog and then the Nazgûl Lord. Andrzej Wicher points out that one of Gandalf's roles is that of a steward, the name signifying the guardian of a narrow path, narrow bridge or passage. Nowhere is that clearer than in the

scene where Gandalf confronts Balrog in Khasad-dûm (Wicher 131). For a moment Éowyn plays the same role; significantly enough, she will later become the wife of the Steward of Gondor; hence, while still a maiden, she unwittingly acts out Faramir's mission of stewardship, the scene being a parallel to Faramir's earlier contending against the evil powers so as to prevent their incursion into Minas Tirith.

The imagery subtly establishes a connection between Gandalf and Éowyn. She is often dressed in white, a parallel to the appearance of Gandalf as the white rider: "Very fair was her face and her long hair was like a river of gold. Slender and tall she was in her white robe with silver; but strong she seemed and stern as steel, a daughter of kings" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 515). This is how she is first shown in Aragorn's focalization upon Gandalf's and his companions' arrival at Théoden's hall. Éowyn's radiance is subtly hinted at through the combination of whiteness, gold and silver. Interestingly, Faramir's perspective on her seems similar: "he saw her as she stood upon the walls; she was clad all in white, and gleamed in the sun" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 961). The last phrase confirms the connection with "the woman clothed with the sun" from the Revelation. This connection is not only noted but also highlighted by Faramir when he offers Éowyn his dead mother's blue mantle embroidered with silver stars. Stars figure in the line from the Apocalypse where the woman clothed with the sun is shown in "a crown of twelve stars." Faramir's reading of Éowyn follows Aragorn's recognition, for he unwittingly completes her picture with the element of silver. His perspective on the shieldmaiden also echoes the description of the beloved from the Song of Songs. Éowyn's basic characteristics remain with her till the end of the narrative when she is "trothplighted" with Faramir: "Lady of Rohan came forth, golden as the sun and white as snow" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 977).

Tolkien critics have associated Galadriel, rather than Éowyn, with Mariology (Wicher 144). Galadriel's attributes also include stars and silver (Burns 253). Besides, she was called Nerwen, i.e. man-maiden, on account of her character. Thus the portrayal of both women draws on Judith, Jael, Mary juxtaposition. Éowyn, like Jael and Judith, must go back to the female role and relinquish her unique status of a shieldmaiden. The narrative takes care of this transit soon after she falls on her dead enemy. She cannot remain with the warriors; Imrahil, Prince of Dol Amroth, is surprised to detect a female warrior among the fallen, but his double recognition is not only connected with her sex but also with the fact that she is alive. The male stranger sets in motion the regulatory mechanism that brings Éowyn back into the fold as a woman in need of male protection. Healed physically by Aragorn, she recovers emotionally due to Faramir,

who also finds recovery in the relationship after his own close brush with death and his devastating history as a son rejected by his father. Éowyn's plea to Aragorn to wish her happiness is the final call on her part to complete the process of emotional healing. Having received the good wish or blessing, she is ready to face her role like the heroines from the Bible who after the songs of praise go back to their homes and ostensibly disappear. Here, however, one more difference emerges. Having accepted Faramir's marriage proposal, Éowyn decides to give up her fondness for the songs of war, and she declares: "I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 965). The reader can remember a passage devoted to the burial of Théoden's horse Snowmane and the burning of the Nazgûl's fell beast: "green and long grew the grass on Snowmane's Howe, but ever black and bare was the ground where the beast was burned" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 845). Éowyn's choice is consistent with the need to rebuild the country after Mordor's invasion, heal the wounds and keep the earth's garden and memory alive.

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Literature That Saves: Matilda as
a Reader of *Great Expectations*
in *Mister Pip* by Lloyd Jones

ABSTRACT

The article reflects on the therapeutic and ethical potential of literature, the theme which is often marginalized and overlooked by literary critics, in the novel *Mister Pip* by Lloyd Jones. Matilda, the main character of the analyzed novel, finds salvation in the times of war and oppression thanks to Charles Dickens's masterpiece, *Great Expectations*, and the only white man on the island—her teacher, Mr. Watts. Matilda's strong identification with Dickensian Pip (their similarities and differences) and imagination make her escape to another world, become a self-conscious person and reunite with her father. The paper also discusses relationships between Matilda, Mr. Watts (her spiritual guide and creator of her story, who presents the girl with expectations for a better future) and her mother, Dolores. I attempt to show the emotional development of the characters, their interactions, changes, sense of identity (significant for both Jones and Dickens), and, having analyzed their actions, I compare them to protagonists created by Charles Dickens (Pip, Miss Havisham, Estella). Needless to say, drawing the reader's attention to British culture and traditions, Lloyd Jones avoids focusing on the negative aspects of the postcolonial views, pointing out that "the white man" can be an example of a Dickensian gentleman.

Keywords: Mister Pip, postcolonial, Mr. Watts, *Great Expectations*, Matilda.

Lloyd Jones, who received the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2007, is one of New Zealand's outstanding contemporary writers. His novel *Mister Pip* is considered one of the most striking works written in New Zealand. In "The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature" Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie describe the writer's distinctive style:

Lloyd Jones is a fiction writer drawn to a sympathetic portrayal of ordinary middle-class life, a suburban realist who simultaneously challenges realism, subverts fictional norms, defies categories and writes narratives which are challenging, original and in some cases controversial.

From the critical perspective, Lloyd Jones successfully portrays the New Zealand community in which he was brought up, combining its realistic portrait "with elements of the bizarre, the absurd and the fantastic" (O'Reilly).

According to some reviewers, by placing Dickens's *Great Expectations* in the exotic reality, Lloyd Jones has entered a noteworthy debate with postcolonial rewriting. Olivia Laing concludes: "Jones has created a microcosm of post-colonial literature, hybridising the narratives of black and white races to create a new and resonant fable." Another reviewer, Lindy Burleigh, states that "Lloyd Jones gives the tired post-colonial themes of self-reinvention and the reinterpretation of classic texts a fresh, ingenious twist but his real achievement is in bringing life and depth to his characters." In her essay Sue Kossew explains that *Mister Pip* is not only a re-writing of *Great Expectations*, but "a celebration of the transnational potential of Dickens's novel . . . , its power to move its readers, and its enduring legacy of hope" (281). Monica Latham's essay, "The Battle for the Spare Room and the Triumph of Hybridity in Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip*," examines, in addition, the subject of a hybrid literary work based on a canonical novel. Jones, following the Dickensian style, also creates a social story, "combining old material with new inventive writing" (Latham 88).

Mister Pip is set on the island of Bougainville whose inhabitants are in the grip of the atrocious civil war that affected some parts of Papua New Guinea in the early 1990s. The island's prosperous copper mine is a trigger of the conflict with a separatist group who decide to claim control of the mine, declaring war on the mainland Papuan troops. As a result, teenage boys are forced to join the guerrilla soldiers who are hiding in the mountains. The island is constantly haunted by the government troops in search of the rebel soldiers. Terrified Bougainville inhabitants have to face the brutality of the war when their houses and all their properties are burnt down, and people are killed, their bodies chopped into pieces and thrown to pigs to be eaten.

In his novel Lloyd Jones entwines two mutually exclusive concepts—the oppression of the inhuman, unpredictable system and the solace found in literature, showing, in my view, that literary texts can change the reader’s perception of reality. Using the phrase “singularity of literature,” Derek Attridge points out that in times of crisis, literary texts cannot serve as a source of personal and social changes. Attridge concludes:

My argument is that literature, understood in its difference from other kinds of writing (and other kinds of reading), solves no problems and saves no souls, nevertheless, as will become clear, I do insist that it is effective even if its effects are not predictable enough to serve a political or moral program. (4)

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Regardless of the above quotation, I contend that in the analyzed novel, *Mister Pip*, literature does save an individual (the teenage heroine Matilda) from psychological disintegration. The child’s first-person narration is similar to Dickens’s strategy where a child’s account is “retrospective but resistant to an orderly presentation of setting and circumstances in a logical manner” (Fludernik 121). Matilda can be called a half-orphan since her father works far away in Australia, leaving Matilda alone with her strict, god-fearing and pious mother. The war causes Matilda to witness the most evil-minded and savage sides of human nature. To my mind, the girl desires a soulmate, a companion she can rely on, and who will lead her through a real life she is unaware of. Matilda’s salvation and escape from the world eventually comes in the form of the only white man on the island, Mr. Watts, called “Pop Eye,” often seen to wear a clown’s nose and pull his wife Grace along in a trolley. Despite his lack of experience in educating children, he makes a decision to work as a teacher in a small, single-room school. His absorption in literature makes him determined to introduce Charles Dickens to the children. Mr. Watts believes that the Victorian author can show the reader another world as a way of escape from the reality in which the characters are forced to live. “I will be honest with you. I have no wisdom, none at all. The truest thing I can tell you is that whatever we have between us is all we’ve got. Oh, and of course Mr. Dickens” (Jones 16).

Not knowing the most distinguished author of the Victorian era, the children believe that Mr. Dickens will provide the blockaded island with the generator fuel, anti-malaria medicines and kerosene. Introducing the pupils to Dickens’s masterpiece *Great Expectations*, Mr. Watts gives hope and reassurance (especially to Matilda), which become more indispensable than fuel and medicine. The daily reading aloud of *Great Expectations* to

the children at school makes Matilda entirely captivated by the book, its main protagonist Pip, and fascinated with the world and characters she has never met before. “It was always a relief to return to *Great Expectations*. It contained a world that was whole and made sense, unlike ours” (58).

The most incomprehensible fact for Matilda is that one can find salvation in a book, in unknown Victorian England with rain, frost, marshes and gloom. I concur with Frederica Uggla who points out that *Mister Pip* is “to a great extent about identification, living through a text and melting into it” (7). The girl identifies herself with Dickens’s character Pip: “Me and Pip had something else in common; I was eleven when my father left, so neither of us really knew our fathers” (Jones 21). What is more, the heroine learns that she can “slip inside the skin of another . . . or travel to another place with marshes, and where, to our ears the bad people spoke like pirates” (20–21). Needless to say, this quotation illustrates the fact that Mr. Watts literally impersonates Dickens’s characters, uses their peculiar manner of speaking, gestures and, as a result, makes the pupils feel the characters’ presence in the classroom. The teacher’s story-telling is much more complex because he mixes the Western traditions and cultures with the fixed norms of the island and, according to Monica Latham, “he gives birth to his hybrid story of survival and makes *Mister Pip* a composite postmodernist and postcolonial novel” (84). Apart from this, Jones’s novel is privileged by numerous acts of the story-telling and orality (in the classroom, around the campfire), “giving weight to the affective power of narrative” (Kossew 282). From the critical perspective, *Mister Pip* consists of “many different texts that are woven together in a complex process of intertextuality” (Uggla 1).

Unlike the book, Andrew Adamson’s film adaptation of the novel explicitly presents the scenes when Matilda moves to Victorian England and stands face to face with her beloved Pip and other characters like Magwitch in the marshes, Joe with his wife, Mr. Jaggers, Herbert, Miss Havisham or Estella. Thanks to the teacher Matilda reconstructs the atmosphere of the novel, Victorian attires and the language used in the 19th century. Moreover, she imagines herself talking to Pip, comforting him and criticizing the boy for his selfish actions. I would like to underline another fact—when Matilda identifies with Pip, somehow she adopts his life: “Pip was my story” (Jones 219). His anxieties, thoughts and even friends and enemies become hers. At the same time she is aware that Pip’s and her changes are parallel. When Pip faces difficulties, apprehensions and cruelties of life, Matilda knows that her life will change for worse. It must be emphasized that, through Pip’s new expectations and life, Matilda begins plunging deeper into other people’s minds, for instance, pondering

over her father's life in remote Australia. It is clearly seen when Pip has to "leave behind everything he'd known" (46)—the place where he was raised and the forge where he was taught a value of labour. At this moment, the novel problematizes Matilda's strong longing for her father. On one hand, Matilda criticizes Pip, on the other hand, feeling abandoned, she definitely transfers all her anger to her father who deserted her emotionally and literally. Being a good observer, Matilda knows that the failure of her parents' marriage is caused by the father who, similarly to Pip, left his descent and family behind:

Away from class I found myself wondering about the life my dad was leading, and what he had become. I wondered if he was a gentleman, and whether he had forgotten all that had gone into making him. I wondered if he remembered me, and if he ever thought about my mum. I wondered if the thought of us kept him awake at night like the thought of him did her. (47)

It has to be stressed that Jones also indicates issues which distinguish Matilda from Pip. The aforementioned quotation alerts the reader to another important undertone. Although Matilda has to face an unknown reality because of the war, she still misses her father and appreciates the significance of her background and home. When Pip steps into the new world of a big city, he changes his identity and starts erasing from his memory the much-loved people who used to give him comfort and support. The boy intentionally separates from Joe and Bidley in order to pursue social advancement and adjust to his new circumstances:

I was troubled by what I had detected to be a shift in Pip's personality now that he was in London. I didn't like his London friends. I didn't take to his housemate Herbert Pocket, and I couldn't understand why Pip had, and it worried me that he was leaving me behind. Nor could I understand why he had changed his name to Handel. (60–61)

Needless to say, unlike Pip, Matilda does not forget about the past and intends to go back to the island—her real home. "I would try where Pip had failed. I would try to return home" (219).

Matilda's strong identification with Pip can be also explained by the fact that their lives and experiences are parallel. Being an orphan brought up by his strict sister, Pip is supposed to experience the world he is not familiar with, going through numerous transformations in his behaviour and personality. Affected by the devastating civil war and by the lack of

a father, Matilda's life changes into a nightmare. Apart from facing the new and brutal reality on the island, Matilda learns about the other world from Dickens's novel, developing her imagination and changing into a mature and self-conscious person. There are other clearly similar moments in both Matilda's and Pip's lives when they nearly escape death, lose hope and the will to fight. They are certain to experience the darkest sides of life like oppression, death of loved ones, illness, crime and a sense of guilt. However, after the death of Matilda's mother and Mr. Watts, the girl survives thanks to the memory of Pip, which gives her strength to escape from the island and reunite with her father in Australia. So powerful is the book's influence that even after undergoing so many brutal events, Matilda does not associate Dickens with negative experiences. It is just the opposite since, after leaving the life of aggression and humiliation, she is still profoundly preoccupied with the Dickensian world. She is determined to broaden her knowledge about Dickens, reading the author's books and visiting his museum in London. She succeeds in becoming a scholar and expert on Dickens, still believing that literature offers salvation and escape in the worst moments of human life. Geraldine Bedell concludes:

As *Great Expectations* opens out its meaning to Matilda, so *Mister Pip* broadens into a consideration of post-colonial culture, a meditation on what is kept and what rejected, what remembered and forgotten, and the extent to which individuals can choose . . . how to be in the world.

Throughout his novel Lloyd Jones consistently draws the reader's attention to *Great Expectations* and British culture that affect the character's relations and identities, thereby not focusing on the negative aspects of the postcolonial condition. The author positively presents Dickens's phenomenon and reminds the reader of the significance of literature in human lives, regardless of its origin. Not only is it palpable in the course of Mr. Watts's reading of the novel, but its presence and influence are also strongly felt through the heroes' actions and thoughts. The impact of the Dickensian theme regarding changes in the characters' actions is apparent in the three protagonists of Jones's narrative: Matilda, Mr. Watts and Matilda's mother, Dolores.

The endless apprehension and the sense of some inevitable doom make Matilda feel hopeless and lost. It is Mr. Watts who gives the girl "another world to spend the night in [or] escape to another place" (Jones 20). In this way, Mr. Watts, previously associated with pulling his wife in a trolley with a clown's nose on, becomes a spiritual guide in Matilda's eyes. He gives her solid foundations to survive. He has given her "another piece of

the world. [She] found [she] could go back to it as often as [she] liked” (21). Apart from Pip, Mr. Tom Watts, who “was more of a mystery because he’d come out of a world we didn’t really know” (21), is the other person Matilda forms an emotionally strong relationship with. Throughout Lloyd Jones’s novel Matilda discovers the new aspects of her teacher’s complex personality.

Matilda perceives Mr. Watts as the last white person on the island whose “sight represented a bit of uncertainty in our world, which in every other way knew only sameness” (2). The girl’s fascination with her teacher begins when she hears his voice and the way he reads Dickens’s greatest masterpiece. Matilda notices that Mr. Watts is extremely respectful towards literature by consistently referring to the author as “Mr. Dickens” and wearing a white suit at school, while reading *Great Expectations*. Despite being curious about Pip’s life, Matilda also desires to go deeper into her teacher’s mind:

He had given us Pip, and I had come to know this Pip as if he were real and I could feel his breath on my cheek. I had learned to enter the soul of another. Now I tried to do the same with Mr. Watts. (52)

Mr. Watts becomes as important to Matilda as Pip is. The girl is aware of the fact that Mr. Watts is Charles Dickens, the narrator of the story, the one who is able to put it together and transport people to another place. According to Monica Latham, Mr. Watts has helped Matilda find her own voice, making her write “her life story in the spirit of the Victorian writer” (88). This quotation also refers to the concept of intertextuality because “most of the stories within *Mister Pip* are told by someone and then written down by the narrator Matilda many years later” (Ugglä 4). Thanks to the teacher, the children at school can “feel the shape of each word” (Jones 18). For Matilda, Mr. Watts is a mentor in her life, who is able to explain the incomprehensible and complex aspects of human nature. Matilda’s being angry with Pip about his misbehaviour and a ruthless attitude towards his dearest is skilfully tamed by Mr. Watts, thus revealing his broad knowledge of the external world and a tolerance of humanity with all its weaknesses:

“It is hard to be a perfect human being, Matilda,” he said. “Pip is only human. He has been given the opportunity to turn himself into whomever he chooses. He is free to choose. He is even free to make bad choices.” (61)

Matilda discovers more unpredictable and enigmatic traits of the teacher’s character when the redskin soldiers come to the island. Mr. Watts

creates his own story, mixing facts of his life with Pip's. ". . . the bones of his story remain with me, what I've come to think of as his Pacific version of *Great Expectations*" (149). Similarly to Dickens, who created Pip and gave him a chance to change his life, Matilda's teacher also fills the girl's head with expectations of escaping from the world of cruelty to a better place: "He was inviting me to leave behind the only world I knew" (150). What is more, Mr. Watts becomes a writer /creator because, to some extent, he writes Matilda's life story and future through her imagination. If it had not been for Mr. Watts and Charles Dickens's text, she would not have had enough strength to survive and start a new life.

It has to be pointed out that during the rebel soldiers' time in the village, Mr. Watts decides to take on Pip's identity and characteristics paying, however, the final price for the decision. "Pip would be a convenient role for Mr. Watts to drop into" (142). As the only white man on the island, like Pip, he feels "as lonely as the last mammoth" (98), and he needs to adapt to the circumstances he is not used to, and he even shares the boy's deepest sorrow and anxieties. This is evident after the burial of his wife Grace, when the children at school compare this solemn situation with Pip and Estella's separation—"his anger was listed on behalf of Pip's suffering, but it came of his own loss" (126). Not only does the comparison show Watt's strong sense of identification with the Dickensian character, but also the teacher's profound absorption in *Great Expectations*. It is worth pointing out that, after leaving the island, Matilda is still determined to discover more about her teacher's previous life. Despite learning about his acting abilities and being angry with him for simplifying Dickens's masterpiece, for Matilda Mr. Watts has always been Mr. Dickens who, like Pip, has become her friend, instilling in her his passion for literature and helping her to survive the hardest times in her life. Paradoxically, in the postcolonial reality "the white man" (representing British culture) turns out to be the example of a moral character, the gentleman formerly described by Charles Dickens:

I only know the man who took us kids by the hand and taught us how to re-imagine the world, and to see the possibility of change, to welcome it into our lives. . . . He was whatever he needed to be, what we asked him to be. . . . We needed a teacher, Mr. Watts became that teacher. We needed a magician to conjure up other worlds, and Mr. Watts had become that magician. When we needed a savior, Mr. Watts had filled that role. When the redskins required a life, Mr. Watts had given himself. (228)

The relationship with Mr. Watts and admiration for Pip described above causes a long-lasting clash between Matilda and her mother Dolores.

The mother is a crucial character in the novel who represents the moral standards of Christianity, calling herself God's witness.

The conflict between the mother and daughter arises when Dolores is apprehensive of the fact that she "would lose her Matilda to Victorian England" (30), to a world of white people. The uneasy feeling of disagreement is strengthened when Matilda confesses to Pip's significant role in her life. The mother starts to put the blame on Mr. Watts and becomes troubled about her daughter's morality. This situation clearly shows Dolores's negative attitude to the former times of colonization of the island and her suspicion of everything that comes from outside. "What made her blood run hot was this white boy Pip and his place in my life. For that she held Mr. Watts personally responsible" (68).

As a dedicated Christian believer, Dolores is firmly convinced that God, not words written in a novel, is the only source of solace that can change lives for the better—Matilda's attempts to involve her mother in the Dickensian world and its characters always come to nothing—"she didn't want me to go deeper into that other world" (30). Frederika Uggla, drawing on postcolonial theory, explains that Dolores cannot accept *Great Expectations* because the novel was brought from the outer world; however, the Bible was brought by missionaries from the outside, as well (8). Dolores's concept of morality is based on the Bible, which is why she is not able to understand the act of theft committed by Pip. Furthermore, Dolores notices that Pip has become more significant to Matilda than her relatives and the other people living on the island. Dolores becomes more and more hostile towards Mr. Watts and does her best to humiliate him and show her aversion towards his beliefs and methods of teaching. Her disapproval of the teacher is noticeable throughout the book, reminiscent of Estella's disdain and hostile attitude towards Pip. ". . . she returned to her favourite pastime of constant put-downs of Mr. Watts, or Pop Eye as she was back to calling him. *Pop Eye*. She put all her contempt into that name" (114).

Dolores's contempt for Mr. Watts can be explained by her inability to come to terms with the fact that her husband has abandoned her, leading a peaceful and secure life in Australia. Mr. Watts—as a "white man"—has come to embody the issue, since, according to Dolores, white people have stolen her spouse and transformed him into a "white man." The sense of Dolores's isolation and her constant bitterness inspire Matilda to compare her mother to Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations*: "She had more in common with Miss Havisham—Miss Havisham who cannot move on from the day of her greatest disappointment" (49), and who is trapped in the time that has irretrievably passed. It has to be underlined

that Dolores cannot step into Matilda's new world, losing control of her daughter and becoming overprotective. The Estella—Miss Havisham and Dolores—Matilda relationships are parallel. Similarly to the emotionally hurt old woman, Dolores wants to destroy this world that she has not given to Matilda. She prefers to stay in her own world of stopped clocks which symbolize her refusal to move forward and accept the new reality. Needless to say, the more preoccupied with Pip's life Matilda is, the more distant from her mother she becomes. However, Uggla attempts to justify Dolores's behaviour explaining that Matilda is "actually colonized by *Great Expectations* and lost in another culture" (17). Perhaps, in this sense, the woman becomes a rebel and wants to protect what belongs to her. Nonetheless, a paradoxical parallel can be discerned between Dolores and Matilda in their attitude towards literary texts. Both protagonists are profoundly dedicated to their particular books (the Bible and *Great Expectations*) which come from the outside (colonization), showing a different reality and providing a source of comfort and values. Dolores and Matilda remain faithful to their ideas derived from the texts and this is the main cause of their clash. The reader can easily feel a wall of mistrust and misunderstanding growing between Matilda, her mother and Mr. Watts. This despondent situation and intensifying tension between the characters, induce Dolores to make a desperate move. When Matilda finds *Great Expectations* hidden in her house, she feels betrayed and realizes that her mother's intention is to destroy Mr. Watts and Pip—the people who have introduced Matilda to a better world: "It is hard to put into words my feeling of betrayal at that moment" (93). The woman remains silent even at the cost of the destruction of the villagers' possessions and houses. It can be explained that Dolores, as a Christian, cannot admit to a sin of theft, thus her greatest mistake in life. At the same time, the girl cannot betray Dolores and decides to take on the burden of carrying her mother's guilt:

I knew what she had been doing. Her silence was meant to destroy Pip and the standing Mr. Watts, a godless white man who would seek to place in her daughter's head a make-believe person with the same status as her kin. (93)

I would like to stress that Dolores's identity throughout the novel turns out to be a process: from an enemy, she becomes Matilda's ally. She seems to understand that she has not achieved anything by her previous behaviour and, like Mr. Watts, she becomes an example of a moral person (like the Dickensian gentleman), accepting, thereby, Mr. Watts's (Dickens's) and Matilda's values which she firmly rejected before: "Sir. I saw your men chop

up the white man. He was a good man. I am here as God's witness" (175). At this moment, for the first time in the novel, Matilda's mother becomes Mr. Watts's supporter and reminds the reader of his uttered words that "to be human is to be moral and you cannot have a day off when it suits" (180). What is more, by doing that, she knows that she will suffer the same fate as Mr. Watts. Not only does the conflict between Matilda and Dolores come to an end, but the girl also sees her mother as a person to be proud of: "My brave mum had known this when she stepped forward to proclaim herself God's witness to the cold-blooded butchery of her old enemy" (180). It is not clear if Dolores's act of bravery has been caused by the violent circumstances of the war or by her true characteristics, which she has been reluctant to reveal before. All in all, her transformation proves both her boundless devotion to her beliefs and her unconditional love for her daughter.

Lloyd Jones's novel shows that literary texts can profoundly transform the reader's view of the world, even if they are alien to postcolonial cultures which are "inevitably hybridised, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 95). I agree with the reviewer Barbara Klonowska who, in her essay "*Great Expectations* a Hundred and Fifty Years Later: Strategies of Appropriation," remarks on the role in literature in *Mister Pip*:

Mister Pip dramatises the saving power of reading, both short-term as an affecting means of reducing fear, and long-term as an explanation and inspiration for life. . . . In a similar manner, *Great Expectations* perform such functions within *Mister Pip*: it is used to soothe, heal and explain, offer consolation and instruction. Like Aboriginal myths, it is not treated as a useless story but as guidance and practice. (231)

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